HOW TO SELL A GENOCIDE

The Media's Complicity in the Destruction of Gaza

Adam H. Johnson

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"*How to Sell a Genocide* vividly and meticulously demonstrates the power of narrative and the powers involved in shaping them... Through painstaking documentation over a 12-month period, Johnson shows how anti-Palestinian racism among elite liberals and liberal institutions constituted 'Moats of Rationalization' that primed Western audiences for genocide."

—Noura Erakat, Human rights attorney and author of *Justice For Some*

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PLUTO PRESS

First published 2026 by Pluto Press
New Wing, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 1LA
and Pluto Press, Inc.
1930 Village Center Circle, 3-834, Las Vegas, NV 89134

www.plutobooks.com

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7453 5165 0 Paperback
ISBN 978 0 7453 5166 7 EPUB
ISBN 978 0 7453 5167 4 PDF

All royalties from the book will be donated to the Middle East Children's Alliance.

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental standards of the country of origin.

Typeset by Stanford DTP Services, Northampton, England

Simultaneously printed in the United Kingdom and United States of America
EU GPSR Authorised Representative
LOGOS EUROPE, 9 rue Nicolas Poussin, 17000, LA ROCHELLE, France
Email: contact@logoseurope.eu

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Foreword

Noura Erakat

In mid-July 2025, Israeli Holocaust Studies scholar, Omer Bartov, published an op-ed in the *New York Times*, titled, "I am a Genocide Scholar. I Know it When I See It."[1] Bartov's proclamation signaled a 180 from his previous insistence in the same paper of record in early November 2023, that "as a historian of genocide, I believe that there is no proof that genocide is now taking place in Gaza, although it is very likely that war crimes, and even crimes against humanity, are happening." Bartov's Israeli identity, together with his initial hesitation, made him a trustworthy interlocutor to legacy media outlets. CNN's Fareed Zacharia, who, in mid-January 2024, proclaimed that Israel was not committing a genocide but may be using disproportionate force[2], invited Bartov to discuss his turn about. The conversation emphasized that despite not being *exactly* like the Nazi Holocaust, Israel's campaign was genocidal, reinforcing the paradigmatic character of Europe's experience.

The tide of public opinion had begun shifting[3] in late July 2025 as Israel's starvation campaign of Palestinians crossed a deleterious threshold that the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) described as Phase 5,[4] also known as "catastrophe." Indeed, two leading Israeli human rights organizations, B'tselem and Physicians for Human Rights, both of which had denied the charge and even amplified unsubstantiated claims[5] of a Hamas mass rape campaign, announced their about-turn on July 28, 2025.[6] Several days later, in early August 2025, Israeli author, David Grossman, announced that with a "broken heart"[7] he must say that the Israeli campaign in Gaza is a genocide. CNN's Cristiane Amanpour proclaimed that Grossman's finding was "huge" as opposed to belated or inadequate or, most obviously, redundant.

Palestinian scholars, activists, and advocates had named the Israeli campaign as genocide within a week of its start when 6,000

bombs had already been dropped on Gaza's besieged population. Within a month, three Palestinian legal organizations—Al Haq, Al Mezan, and the Palestine Center for Human Rights—submitted a petition to the International Criminal Court charging Israel with genocide. Most Palestinians recognized the large-scale assault as a continuation of the ongoing Nakba. Not only because of the previous large-scale attacks on the coastal enclave in 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2021, but also because of the sustained Zionist campaign to remove, dispossess, and contain Palestinians in order to take their place. This basic understanding, which Israeli leaders themselves proclaimed as early as November 2023, emphasized that history did not begin on October 7 and that Gaza was not a floating island but part of a larger Palestinian geography. It was precisely because of the Nakba that Palestinians could name the campaign as genocidal,[8] and it was precisely because of the Nakba's elision[9] that Zionists and their allies could deny it for 19 months of unyielding atrocities.

In the first months of the annihilatory campaign, Palestinian experts and journalists joined legacy media outlets to amplify the charge of genocide and, invariably, to defend themselves. Not a single Palestinian guest appeared without being interrogated: "Do you condemn Hamas?"—a ritual that Palestinian author and clinical psychologist, Hala Alyan, aptly described as an "audition for humanity."[10] This treatment of Palestinian interlocutors stood in glaring contrast to the Israeli and Jewish guests who began making the same charge later on, in the summer of 2025.

Bartov, Grossman, and others were provided platforms, treated as experts, and even celebrated as courageous. Notably, during this momentous shift, none of the Palestinians who had earlier battled in racist media arenas were invited back. In fact, most of them had disappeared from mainstream news outlets—a result of outright censorship[11] and blacklisting[12] by executive producers who deemed their presence too dangerous. Unlike the Palestinian experts, the Israeli ones cabined their analysis of Israel's genocide to Gaza, and sometimes, the West Bank. For them, the roots of structural violence reflected the ascendance of a far-right government led by Benjamin Netanyahu and, at most, reached back only to the 1967

occupation.[13] As harsh as their accusations were, they preserved Israel's essential innocence and framed the genocide as a rupture rather than a continuation of the Nakba, one that was arguably on par with the state's foundational violence.

But it wasn't just that Israeli guests were seen as safer than Palestinians, it was also the media's own complicity in the genocide. I remember vividly on October 17, 2023, seeing the BBC run a headline about weapons beneath the Al Ahli hospital. Aware of the stale and racist "human shields" talking point, I immediately wondered whether the BBC was priming us for an Israeli attack. Within hours, an Israeli missile struck the hospital,[14] killing 471 Palestinians and injuring 342 others. The British media giant soon joined dozens of other outlets in questioning who was responsible[15] for the strike, curbing outrage at Israel and priming audiences for the systematic destruction of Gaza's healthcare infrastructure in the months to follow.

The BBC has been particularly notorious for its media bias. In early November 2024, 100 BBC staff together with 200 other media professionals penned an anonymous letter accusing the outlet of inadequate coverage, and a failure to challenge Israeli claims, which "has systematically dehumanised Palestinians." The letter continued that the BBC's "erosion of its own editorial standards has put its impartiality and independence at serious risk,"[16] thus highlighting a harm not only to Palestinians but to the journalistic profession. In early June 2025, the Center for Media Monitoring published a damning report[17] on the BBC's Gaza coverage. After analyzing 35,000+ pieces of BBC content, the report found that the BBC "gave Israeli deaths 33 times more coverage per fatality"; that it "applied 'massacre' 18 times more to Israeli casualties"; that it "used 'murder' 220 times for Israelis" as opposed to once for Palestinians; that "BBC presenters shut down genocide claims in over 100 documented instances"; and that, not only did the network interview significantly fewer Palestinians than Israelis, its presenters "shared the Israeli perspective 11 times more frequently than the Palestinian perspective."

I experienced this bias multiple times as a guest on the BBC. Beyond what happened on air, there were telling exchanges with

BBC producers—mostly of being invited and then disinvited. In one such instance, a sympathetic producer wanted to me to explain to audiences that not all Palestinians were members of Hamas and I could not bite my tongue long enough to have the opportunity to denigrate the question on air. "This question is incredibly racist," I snapped at the producer. Political affiliation does not alter a civilian's status. I raged that no one asks whether Israelis voted for Netanyahu and that despite the false claims of WMDs in Iraq, ordinary Americans were never considered culpable for the destruction of an entire country and its subsequent occupation. Asking about Palestinian affiliation suggests that their political sympathies made them legitimate targets when laws of war are unequivocal that only militants engaged in combat can be killed. Caught off guard, the producer thanked me and said she would get back to me about the segment. Knowing she would not call back, I texted her to recommend other Palestinians to invite, "please allow Palestinians to speak for themselves."

Transcripts of my BBC interviews constitute an archive not only of the genocide but of how genocides happen and why media corporations are criminally liable under the Genocide Convention. After a months-long hiatus, the BBC invited me to a studio interview about the first fake ceasefire in January 2025. Though I was on antibiotics for a bacterial infection and had to drive 4 hours to get to the studio in Washington, DC, I accepted the invitation for an opportunity to speak directly to a BBC audience. What happened off screen was as significant as the exchange itself.

The booking producer had explained that the BBC really wanted a Palestinian expert and promised me that I would not be tokenized. He explained I would be given 5-6 minutes of airtime, which is a lifetime on news television. Though I refused to get make up done and waited several minutes to be allowed into the studio, my live segment was cut to 2.5 minutes because "time had run out." I was outraged and refused to leave the studio. A senior producer rushed into the room to placate me, insisting that the abrupt ending had nothing to do with my content. I was immovable. It was unacceptable to treat me like this. Unable to find the booking producer whose promises I believed, I began to call his name, and now others

gathered. As a result of my stubborn resolve—forged by fatigue, frustration, and incalculable heartbreak—I stood my ground until they agreed to re-record the interview for the 5-6 minutes they promised and to play it on their live broadcast set to run later that night. That was the last time the BBC called me.

The silencing of Palestinians has been endemic and in no place more cruel than in Gaza itself, where heroic Palestinian journalists have reported on their own genocide even while starving, enduring displacement, mourning their loved ones, and being hunted. As of this writing, Israel has assassinated 270 Palestinian journalists.[18] Each assassination has felt like losing a family member whose voice has boomed in our homes and whose face had become familiar and comforting. Genocides could not be perpetrated without manufacturing consent for them by both blaming the victims for their suffering and dehumanizing a people so thoroughly that questions of culpability do not even matter. The battle terrain in media is as, if not more, significant than legal and political terrains because narratives have the power to describe untold cruelty in detail while calling it civilized and necessary.

Adam Johnson's book, *How to Sell a Genocide*, vividly and meticulously demonstrates the power of narrative and the powers involved in shaping them. Johnson uses quantitative and qualitative methods to, in his words, "prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the genocide in Gaza was enabled, facilitated, and cheerled by establishment US media providing cover for months of a nihilistic campaign of starvation, bombing, arbitrary detention, shooting, and sexual violence." This methodology is as significant as the book's findings. Focusing on nine major outlets, Johnson scrutinizes 12,000 articles and 5,000 TV segments, and interviews sources from those newsrooms. Together, he successfully consolidates the receipts for manufactured consent for industrial-scale slaughter. Receipts that reflect why Article IV of the Genocide Convention names not only "constitutionally responsible rulers" and "public officials" as potentially culpable for genocide, but "private individuals" as well.

By focusing on what he describes as the "Center-Left media," Johnson is keen to show that the support for Israel's genocide in

Gaza exceeded partisan politics. Instead, it reflects a commitment to Zionist settler sovereignty in Palestine which has united the US-based center-left and the right in their racial animus towards Palestinians. Through painstaking documentation over a 12-month period, Johnson shows how anti-Palestinian racism among elite liberals and liberal institutions constituted "Moats of Rationalization" that primed Western audiences for genocide. The dehumanization of a people is listed as the fourth stage of the ten stages of genocide. The continuum between racist domination and genocidal destruction is also embodied in international law as evidenced by the fact that three of the specific acts enumerated in the Genocide Convention are repeated verbatim in the Apartheid Convention. A reminder that racism is not merely an impediment to equality but also a threat to life. This is a critical exercise because, as Johnson reminds us, in a time of extreme polarization undergirded by moneyed interests, "there is something to be said for the truth for its own sake."

Palestine has exposed so much: the fallacy of universalism, the enduring chasm between the Global North and South, the relationship between law and power, the limits of academic freedom, the authoritarian nature of so-called democracies, as well as the outright racist and colonial complicity of media. Though beyond daunting, this clarity also empowers us to fight better and more effectively. More than anything, it empowers us to rely on ourselves and resolve to build the world we want rather than contort ourselves to fit into worlds built and sustained upon our destruction.

This forward is based on an article,"Radio Rwanda and the Media Complicity in Genocide," originally published as part of the Public Humanities Journal Special Issue on Palestine as a Paradigm: How Gaza Changed the World.

Introduction

> "They are deceiv'd that acquiesce to things which they have heard, and believe not what they have seen."
>
> —Thomas Bartholin, *The Anatomical History* (1653)

In analyzing how American media helped create the political, ideological, and moral conditions for mass death in Gaza from October 2023 to October 2024, one must always make clear the stakes, situate the media criticism in the context of the actual humans who died—those who had limbs blown off, their children starved to death, watched loved ones waste away from preventable disease, saw their families torn apart. Lives upended, dreams snuffed out. Whole universes destroyed with the push of a button, the casual firing of a sniper rifle, the command to "remove a threat" from a faceless AI-assisted officer in an air-conditioned room. Death counts are abstractions: Numbers don't register on a gut level, anything over what can be counted ceases to have significance in our mind's eye, so it becomes cold, academic, numbing.

This is before the statistics detailing mass death on an unprecedented scale run through the normal Western cognitive dissonance filters that, of course, existed long before October 7, 2023: The Hollywood-curated heat ripple sunrise with the Islamic call to prayer in the background signaling a wholly different world, the soothing "they've been fighting for thousands of years" faux-savvy pseudo-history, the "War on Terror" framework that reduces all *their* violence to sadistic glee and *ours* to a reluctant, if messy, "Defense of Civilization."

Center-Left mainstream news media in the US didn't invent these initial prejudices but they certainly played to them, lent them fake intellectual credibility, built off of them, and constantly pandered to their corrosive and reductive version of history and present—all to create space for a Democratic president arming and funding what

would end up being one of the worst, if not the worst, human rights crimes of the 21st century.

This book will argue that this process was neither inevitable nor self-sustaining: It took deliberate choices by deliberate moral actors—editors, reporters, bookers, producers, and TV personalities—who decided, early on in the so-called "Israel–Hamas war," that defending the powerful and spinning a fictional narrative to soothe Western liberal audiences was more important than speaking plain truths, than defending a dispossessed people from a wholly asymmetric campaign carried out by Israel with the full backing of the US to destroy, in whole or in part, the Palestinians of Gaza.

Like any good media critic, my job is one of prosecutor. What this book seeks to do is not to make this case with polemic or ideological assertions, or selective examples of bad coverage, but with robust data. By pulling from over 12,000 articles and 5,000 TV clips in nine major outlets, and showing all the work in open source format, by interviewing sources who were in the room, and using comparative analysis of other contemporary conflicts, I will attempt to prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the genocide in Gaza was enabled, facilitated, and cheerled by establishment US media providing cover for months of a nihilistic campaign of starvation, bombing, arbitrary detention, shooting, and sexual violence.

And in doing so, we will always come back to the actual humans who actually died, who suffered, who lost arms, loved ones, homes, family heirlooms, and whole worlds. They existed and exist, they are real, they lived and had joy and hopes. And, as I will show, there's a direct line between their subjugation and slow deaths buried under rubble, and American media's decision to incite against them, dehumanize them, ignore them, strip them of their history and their narratives, and prioritize domestic political convenience and crude chauvinist narratives over doing what news media's job ostensibly is: to tell the truth.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In alignment with determinations from Amnesty International,[1] Human Rights Watch,[2] Doctors Without Borders,[3] the United

Nations,[4] and the consensus among genocide scholars,[5] I chose to use the word "genocide" to describe the course of events outlined in this book, beginning on the evening of October 7, 2023, into the present. I made this decision and chose to use it in the title of the book, not to be provocative for its own sake, but because it is both a consensus in the academic and human rights world and also an objective, well-documented feature of our reality. My goal with this book was to write a sober, approachable, data-driven account of how the media provided cover for Israel's destruction of Gaza—whatever one chooses to call it. In doing this, I wanted to describe, in clear and specific terms, the methods and explicit motives of US and Israeli officials without being needlessly polemical or hinging too much of my argumentation on totalizing, emotionally-charged terms. But reality is reality, and trying to discuss this destruction of Gaza without positioning it in the context of genocide would veer from sober and understated to dishonest and—frankly—what amounts to genocide denial. Throughout the book, I will thus use the term genocide and, when appropriate, ethnic cleansing. I will also employ more generic terms in the interest of variety and popular understanding, namely "war," "conflict," and related language. The point in doing so is not to undersell the totality of genocide, or to convey false symmetry, but to make the text more readable and varied.

A small portion of this book will draw on previously published analysis and data, versions of which have run in the *Nation*,[6] the *Column*,[7] the *Real News Network*,[8] and *In These Times*.[9]

SCOPE OF THE BOOK AND THE MOATS OF RATIONALIZATION

The book will not focus on the conservative or MAGA media's dehumanization of Palestinians for the simple fact that the pernicious nature of their media regime is not in doubt or dispute. Outlets like *Fox News*, *Daily Wire*, right-wing AM radio, *Sinclair News*, and the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* are, for the most part, openly genocidal against Palestinians and make no pretense otherwise. They are proudly so, and any book detailing their torrent of incitement would

likely be met by the reporters, pundits, and columnists under their employment with an "Okay, and?"

Thus, my focus will be on what I broadly call Center-Left, liberal, legacy, or even mainstream media. None of these three terms is ideal; they all have limitations and carry their own baggage. "Center-Left" implies a neat ideological orientation that undersells the diversity of thought within the media organizations I will be discussing. "Liberal media" has, of course, its own right-coded history. "Mainstream media" has become a pejorative associated with unsophisticated internet missives against such outrages as basic fact-checking and sensible appeals to authority. Nevertheless, in the absence of a perfect term, and given my queasiness with attempting to coin my own taxonomy, I will use these pop terms throughout the book, often interchangeably, while still acknowledging they are far from perfect. Put simply: I am concerned with media primarily consumed by Democrats that has influence on both Democratic voters and the broader Democratic Party ideological universe.

Why? Because, as I will argue in this book, there was a Democratic president in office when the genocide began in earnest, and support from Democrats in Congress and in the think-tank and media world was dispositive in continuing said genocide during the given time frame of my study. Obviously, President Trump has since overseen and co-authored the genocide in Palestine, and his responsibility—and the responsibility of the broader, openly pro-genocide Republican Party—should not be ignored or downplayed.[10] But that responsibility is beyond the scope of the book, which focuses on the nominal leftwing party backing the arming and funding of the destruction of Gaza.

But most acutely, it's simply a matter of timing. The reality is that once the initial shock and anger over the sheer brutality of Israel's military campaign wore off after the first three to six months, the pressure to change the dynamics and compel Israel to agree to a ceasefire grew all the more difficult. Once the "facts on the ground" were established and daily mass deaths in Gaza began to be totally normalized in the American public's mind, and removed from the daily front pages, efforts to end the genocide became far more dif-

ficult. Thus, the first year, and the first few months in particular, will primarily be the focus of the book. It was during this timeframe that the fundamental logic and axioms of the "war on Hamas" were cemented, and therefore genocide in Gaza became a *fait accompli*.

In this book, I will structure the pernicious role of Center-Left media in what I will call the "Moats of Rationalization." The basic concept for this model is the nonstop destruction of Gaza for the twelve months I cover here, the sheer brutality and one-sidedness of which was obvious from the onset, and that was impossible for any otherwise moral person to ignore outright. So an elaborate framework of excuse-making, deflection, faux-savvy realpolitik, orientalist tropes, and glaring double standards emerged to justify the White House's lockstep support for producing carnage everyone could easily witness across their social media timelines on a daily basis. Living in a world where our government, especially a Democratic president, could not possibly be supportive of such manifest cruelty, Moats of Rationalization emerged to allow the average media consumer—and media worker—to cope with the undeniable, and untenable war crimes being carried out by their leaders before their eyes. These Moats of Rationalization ran the spectrum from outright support for mass death to desperate liberal-left argument by *Non Sequitur* and argument by Trolly Problem, as seen overleaf.

Where Center-Left media intervened, and what we will mostly cover, are items three through seven.

The primary role of our Center-Left media, I will argue, was not to accurately convey reality but, for want of a better descriptor, to make their readers and viewers *feel better*—to give them ready-made talking points pursuant to moats three through seven. To make them feel better about their country, their president, their party, their institutions, and themselves. It was to rationalize, negotiate, obscure, and, ultimately, deny the most inconvenient of truths: a genocide carried out, defended, and authored by elite liberals and liberal institutions.

They would, among themselves, never put it this way, but the outcome was the same. As sources from CNN to CBS to MSNBC repeatedly conveyed to me, it was never framed in such sinister

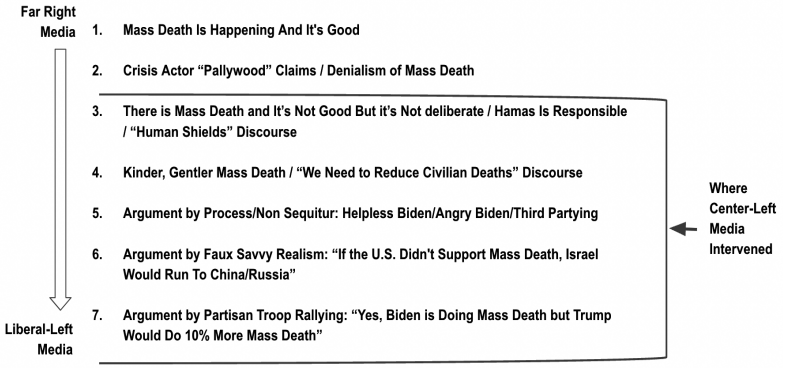
Far Right Media
1. Mass Death Is Happening And It's Good
2. Crisis Actor "Pallywood" Claims / Denialism of Mass Death
3. There is Mass Death and It's Not Good But it's Not deliberate / Hamas Is Responsible / "Human Shields" Discourse
4. Kinder, Gentler Mass Death / "We Need to Reduce Civilian Deaths" Discourse
5. Argument by Process/Non Sequitur: Helpless Biden/Angry Biden/Third Partying
6. Argument by Faux Savvy Realism: "If the U.S. Didn't Support Mass Death, Israel Would Run To China/Russia"
7. Argument by Partisan Troop Rallying: "Yes, Biden is Doing Mass Death but Trump Would Do 10% More Mass Death"
Liberal-Left Media
Where Center-Left Media Intervened

Figure 0.1 Moats of Rationalization

terms within the newsrooms or over after-hours cocktails. It was, instead, packaged in the far more reasonable language of "nuance," "lowering the temperature," "combating antisemitism," savvy appeals to "complexity," and "limits on American power." And, as November 2024 got closer, not poisoning the well too much with minority and young voters, and preventing Trump from marching back into the White House. All seemingly high-minded, all—in isolation—even sensible. But all very much, at least in principle, *not the role of media*. Truth took a back seat to feelings, the urgency of stopping a clear-as-day genocidal campaign in its infancy, and to the short-term electoral needs of Democrats.

So what followed was, I will argue in this book, the most consequential media scandal of the 21st century—more deliberate, more high-leverage, and more deadly than the build-up to the Iraq invasion, and, to this day, far less truly understood. The consequences of widespread media complicity in the Gaza genocide are still not fully appreciated; the impact—especially among the younger, more social media-oriented public—still not fully internalized. This book seeks to be a corrective, not to save Center-Left media from itself, or to try and improve it—indeed, such a task is well beyond my moral or intellectual scope—but for history, for those interested in posterity and what occurred in late 2023 into 2024, and for other media analysts and activists to build from. But, most of all, it's a book for

those interested in the truth in and of itself. And in a world where all intellectual output seems to have to fit a partisan narrative or serve some broader nonprofit goal of liberal improvement, I think there's something to be said for the truth for its own sake.

1

"40 beheaded babies," the ISIS-ification of Hamas, and how to prime the American public for revenge

There are many false stories justifying the destruction of Gaza. But to zero in on an object lesson in media complicity, especially in the early days of the assault when the American public was being primed for a long, brutal campaign of mass removal and death, there is no story that was more consequential for setting the stage than the supposed beheading of 40 Israeli babies. This claim went viral and quickly entered into the public consciousness—repeated even by the president of the United States.

Other reporters, academics, and commentators have done detailed work debunking this claim and tracing the media's complicity. This includes early skeptical reporting by *Electronic Intifada*,[1] *Business Insider*,[2] the *Intercept*,[3] *Mondoweiss*,[4] and *Aljazeera*.[5] I will expand on their findings but also seek to position the story as part of a broader PR campaign, and a much longer effort to obscure the antecedents of Palestinian violence and index the conflict in a plug-and-play "War on Terror" framework that Western audiences could easily dissect—and just as easily dismiss as mindless violence.

In the wake of the Hamas-led October 7 attack that left roughly 1,200 dead in southern Israel, when information was pouring in from Israeli officials and reporters on the ground, one story in particular struck a chord with an outraged public ready to believe just about anything about the "terrorists" in question: that rescue workers had found the remains of about "40 beheaded babies" at

the Kfar Aza kibbutz, one of the communities attacked by Hamas and other Palestinian militants that Saturday morning. On October 10, Israeli news channel i24 reported that it had received "confirmation" from soldiers that "40 babies/children were beheaded."[6] That same day, a spokesperson for the IDF repeated this claim to *Business Insider*.[7] And on October 11, a spokesperson for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told CNN that babies and toddlers were found with their "heads decapitated" in Kfar Aza kibbutz.[8]

In the days just prior and after, this claim was repeated, without evidence or skepticism, by CNN's Nic Robertson,[9] CNN's Abby Phillip,[10] *Media Matters*' Matthew Gertz,[11] *New York Post*'s Olivia Land,[12] CBS Evening News anchor Norah O'Donnell,[13] *New Lines*' Lisa Goldman,[14] *The Hill*'s Laura Kelly and Sharon Udasin,[15] CBS News' Holly Williams and Erin Lyall,[16] an un-bylined piece at Reuters,[17] Sky News' Yashee Sharma,[18] MSNBC's Joe Scarborough, NBC News' Peter Alexander, Summer Concepcion, and Megan Lebowitz.[19] And, live on-air, CNN's Sara Sidner and Hadas Gold somberly repeated the claim on October 11, without an ounce of skepticism.[20] "We have some really disturbing new information out of Israel," Sidner said, looking into the camera, doing her best Walter Cronkite. "The Israeli Prime Minister's spokesman just confirmed: babies and toddlers were found with their heads decapitated … that has been confirmed by the Prime Minister's office."

Sidner called the claim "beyond devastating," then went on to lament, "For the families listening, for the people of Israel, for anyone that is a parent, who loves children, I don't know how they get through this."

Sidner then threw it over to a CNN reporter in Jerusalem, Hadas Gold, and implied the decapitation of babies would make peace or a ceasefire with Hamas an impossibility. Gold replied, "How can you when you're dealing with people who would do such atrocities to children, to babies, to toddlers?" Gold again said the report had been "confirmed" by the prime minister's office and proceeded to compare the alleged atrocity to the Holocaust. She responded to a Hamas denial that it had decapitated babies as not credible because "we literally have video of these guys, of these militants, of these ter-

rorists, doing exactly what they say they're not doing to civilians and to children."

But no such video existed or currently exists because it never happened. It was a lie thrown out on-air by Gold and Sidner to millions of viewers.

The idea that a government cannot "confirm" their own self-serving tabloid claims appears not to have crossed the minds of CNN's Standards department. The shocking viral story culminated with President Joe Biden telling reporters that not only had Hamas decapitated children, but that he had seen photos of the horrors himself.

"I never really thought that I would see and have confirmed pictures of terrorists beheading children," he said at a public event on the afternoon of October 11.

Quickly, an unsourced, unverified rumor had made its way from Israeli officials to American reporters and into the statements of the most powerful person in the world. There was only one problem: The story was a whole cloth fabrication. Traced to Israeli military personnel and ZAKA, a Far-Right "disaster response" organization with a long history of fabulism, the gruesome tale didn't need to be true—it just needed to serve the function of ISIS-ifying Hamas in the mind of the American public. By the time it was debunked or walked back by those attempting to maintain credibility, the meme had already spread, and the dehumanization of an entire population was sufficiently underway.

#HAMASISISIS AND THE UTILITY OF THE "WAR ON TERROR" FRAME

Israeli propagandists didn't pick the "40 beheaded babies" narrative at random. It was chosen because it called on very specific anti-Arab, anti-Muslim tropes that could easily be internalized and instrumentalized by the Western audiences they relied on for political and military support. Indeed, the media grammar for essentializing Palestinian violence as inherently nihilistic and cruel has been long in the making, propped up by years of "War on Terror," clash-of-civilization frameworks that positioned all Islamic,

Arab, or Muslim-coded violence as something carried out for the sole purpose of sadistic glee, racial hatred of Jews, or an attempt to "martyr" oneself to achieve posthumous religious glory.

Rather than attempting to contextualize violence, explain its motivations—whether targeting civilians or combatants, whether justified or not—there was an early effort by both media decision-makers and pro-Israel pressure groups to *ISIS-ify* Palestinian militants, to reduce their motives to, at best, a racial hatred of Jewish people or, at worst, nihilistic jihadi bloodlust. The fact that Hamas had long been in violent conflict with ISIS and had a completely different theological and ideological program wasn't important.[21] What was important was to say Hamas and ISIS in the same sentence as much as possible. This was a strategy adopted by the Israeli government, which pushed out ads promoting the hashtag #HamasisISIS on social media and repeated this "Hamas is ISIS" talking point during every media appearance in the weeks after October 7.[22] (It's worth noting that in June 2025, Israeli outlet Haaretz reported that the Israeli military had been arming ISIS-linked gangs in Gaza to counter Hamas, a fact publicly confirmed by Netanyahu's former Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman.)[23]

It was a message other Western leaders embraced. On October 10, President Biden said in a speech, "The brutality of Hamas' bloodthirstiness brings to mind the worst rampages of ISIS."[24] US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told an Israeli audience on October 13 that what Hamas did was "worse than ISIS."[25] On October 24, French President Emmanuel Macron appeared alongside Netanyahu and proposed an international coalition like the one that fought the Islamic State. "France is ready for the international coalition against Daesh," he told reporters, "in which we are taking part for operations in Iraq and Syria to also fight against Hamas."[26]

It was a talking point repeated, with little pushback, in American media. A review of the first month of coverage in both print and online media post-October 7 shows that Hamas was equated with ISIS in *USA Today*, CNN.com, *Politico*, the *New York Times*, *Axios*, Associated Press, and the *Washington Post* 149 times, largely reprinting uncritical quotes from Israeli and US officials. There were also

102 mentions in these publications of "beheadings," the most infamous of these being the "beheaded babies/children" claim that, after it was debunked, vaguely drifted into generalized "beheadings" to avoid outright lying. The *ISIS-ification* of Hamas was much worse in cable news, with on-air CNN voices equating Hamas with ISIS 350 times and MSNBC commentators doing so 369 times in the first month of the war. CNN mentioned "beheadings," including nonexistent beheadings of babies and infants, 77 times, and MSNBC did so 82 times.

The *New York Times* also brought the label "terrorist" out of retirement immediately after October 7. The term had largely fallen out of favor with many mainstream outlets as a straight news label, as it became increasingly clear its usage was selective and racially loaded. The Associated Press and the BBC dropped it altogether over 20 years prior, and the *New York Times* began using it less and less in the late 2010s. Indeed, the *New York Times* never described any of the Hamas attacks on Israelis after 2015 as a "terrorist attack" (outside of quoting public officials) until after October 7, 2023, then proceeded to do so 360 times in the following year. Pro-Israel lobbying organizations were increasingly pressuring news outlets to use the term, and many reporters and pundits followed suit. What happened on October 7 couldn't just be "an attack," it had to be something more profound, more sinister, and more removed from history and any secular political aims. When I asked why the *New York Times* decided to break from the Associated Press and BBC—who stuck to their guns in refusing to use the label after October 7—*New York Times* Managing Director for External Communications Nicole Taylor did not address the substance of my criticism, instead relying on evasive PR-speak. Taylor wrote:

> We're deliberate, specific, and sensitive in the language we use. We avoid labels and always take care when using phrases like "terrorist attack," "hostages," or "prisoners" to ensure these words are used with context and explanation. We avoid words that are politicized, and we don't use words that could have legal, political, or other consequences, unless they are supported by facts. Our aim

> is to focus on clarity and precision, describing what happened rather than resting on a label. Editors make careful and deliberate choices in the language we use in each individual story.

So, the *New York Times* "takes care" to use the word terrorist but never, by definition, does so for Israel, no matter how many children they kill.

There were, of course, hundreds of killings on October 7, in addition to the kidnapping of children, but this wasn't sufficient to prime the American public with the requisite rage needed to justify Israeli plans to render Gaza unlivable. So American and Israeli propagandists needed to embellish and—most important of all—*racially code* the attack in ways that US audiences would index as ontologically evil. Put simply: Israeli officials, already mapping out their plans for indiscriminate bombings, expulsion, and starvation, needed to foreclose on the possibility of a political solution and render demands for a ceasefire out of the realm of Political Seriousness. The Palestinian militants had to be cartoon terrorists in urgent need of "elimination"—no matter the human costs. The quickest way to do this was to render them ISIS-like in the minds of Western audiences, and the quickest way to do this was to invent or exaggerate lurid stories of mass beheadings and related acts of gratuitous savagery—a task US media dutifully helped them achieve.

A CLAMPDOWN ON CONTEXT

Journalists at legacy outlets seeking to complicate the one-dimensional "Hamas is ISIS" narrative were swiftly disciplined by corporate media executives and pro-Israel pressure groups. The most conspicuous example being what happened on the morning of October 7, when two MSNBC anchors, Ali Velshi and Ayman Mohyeldin, made the mistake of trying to explain why militants in Gaza would attack southern Israel. "Ali Velshi is on-air when October 7 happens," a former MSNBC journalist recalled to us. "And when he's on-air, he calls Ayman [Mohyeldin] and urges him to make himself available as a guest. Ayman comes in, and they are both on-air as the news is

coming out, and Ayman does this whole thing about the history of the conflict."

Mohyeldin, who was the only MSNBC journalist to have actually lived in Gaza for a long period of time, was an obvious person to turn to when Palestinian militants from Gaza poured into Israel and carried out a major attack. At no point in the broadcast did Mohyeldin or Velshi justify or condone the attacks, nor did they downplay the violence unfolding in real time—they simply provided background on why such an attack would take place.[27] But a former MSNBC journalist believes this contextualization was seen as excuse-making by MSNBC and Comcast management, as the network's narrative quickly shifted neatly into pre-existing "War on Terror" moral and journalistic frameworks.

"We don't want context," said a source with knowledge of the conversations, paraphrasing MSNBC's editorial line. This top-down criticism from Comcast corporate was cryptically covered by the *New York Times* in May 2024: "Comcast, NBC's corporate owner, which is loath to intervene in news coverage, took the rare step of conveying its concern to MSNBC's leaders when some hosts and guests criticized Israel as the Hamas attack was unfolding on October 7.[28] But, according to this source, the issue wasn't "criticizing Israel as the Hamas attack was unfolding," it was providing historical context for the ongoing incursion into southern Israel, providing viewers with some sense of *why* such an attack would take place.

"People lost their shit at Comcast," a source recounted. "Comcast intervened with [then-president of MSNBC] Rashida [Jones] and [head of NBC News] Cesar Conde. It went down the line—jobs were on the line at the time."

On October 9, according to a person who was on the call, MSNBC management brought long-time NBC Middle East correspondent Martin Fletcher out of retirement and made him the in-house expert that all on-air talent, journalists, producers, and editors were to reach out to when writing copy or building stories on what was happening in Gaza. A phone call was arranged with Fletcher and dozens of MSNBC staff members, according to an MSNBC source

and corroborating documents. Fletcher, who had family impacted by October 7, quickly ran down a laundry list of dehumanizing anti-Palestinian distortions, dubious histories, and outright falsehoods.

"He [Fletcher] told MSNBC staff that Israel left behind greenhouses for the Palestinians in 2005—the classic trope." This was a reference to a pro-Israel talking point, long discredited, that when Israeli settlers evacuated Gaza in 2005 (before they sieged and encircled the small strip of land), they benevolently left behind the means for Gazans to prosper.

Our source recalls how Martin listed off every pro-Israel cliche in the book. "Gaza could have become the new Singapore," they quoted Martin saying, "but Hamas destroyed them, he said … [The real] Palestinians were actually the Jews. He claimed Palestinian was not a word or a thing until after 1967. It was co-opted by the Arabs after 1967, and he said Palestine as a country doesn't exist."

Another major TV news network imposed a similar ban on anything that vaguely approached context, according to a former staffer at the network we spoke to on condition of anonymity. (We are leaving out the name of his network to ensure he is not identifiable.) "I was the staffer on duty on October 7. So I was obviously one of the only people working, if you remember, it was a Saturday," he told me over a Signal call.

> I brought five different guests, and I tried to have a nice mix of Middle Eastern professors, specialists—people who had worked in Palestinian aid or worked on these things. I tried to make sure every guest, every show, had one guest going into Monday. And then I came into work on Monday, and I found that all of my guests have been canceled and replaced.

When asked who replaced them, he told us, "IDF spokespeople."

Those who provided context were subjected to discipline most formally at CNN. The company issued an internal directive that on-air reporters and commentators had to make clear that history began on October 7, 2023, and all the horrors taking place in Gaza

after October 7 were the direct cause of only one party: Hamas. "We will of course cover both the Israeli campaign in Gaza and the human consequences of the campaign and quarantine fully," CNN CEO Mark Thompson laid out in a memo to CNN editors entitled "Coverage Guidelines," as first reported by Daniel Boguslaw at the *Intercept* in January 2024. "But we must continue to remind our audiences of the immediate cause of this current conflict, namely the Hamas attack and mass murder and kidnap of Israeli civilians."[29]

Another directive from CNN management in the days after October 7, also first reported by Boguslaw, required that "all copy on all platforms that's connected in any way to the Israeli or Palestinian stories" must "be approved in advance by the Jerusalem bureau." This bureau is overseen by Israeli censors and is generally known for producing a more favorable slant for Israel. As one anonymous source told Boguslaw, "Every single Israel–Palestine-related line for reporting must seek approval from the [Jerusalem] bureau—or, when the bureau is not staffed, from a select few handpicked by the bureau and senior management—from which lines are most often edited with a very specific nuance" that, in Boguslaw's words "favors Israeli narratives."

Meanwhile, the most sensational, unsourced claims about Palestinians could casually be repeated on-air by CNN guests, and there would be no pushback. In addition to the dozens of false claims on-air about "beheaded babies," Elisha Wiesel went on CNN's News Central and claimed that Hamas "baked babies in ovens," while CNN anchor Pamela Brown nodded along—despite this claim having long been debunked even in right-wing Israeli media.[30] The standard was established in the early days of the "military response": the most lurid, evidence-free claims could be tossed around about Palestinians and Palestinian violence, but this standard did not apply when discussing Israelis, whose alleged actions had to be triple vetted, including by the Israel-friendly CNN Jerusalem bureau.

I spoke to one journalist willing to go on the record about how he faced internal blowback for pushing back on early efforts to liken Hamas to ISIS. Adam Elmahrek used to work as an investigative reporter for the *LA Times*, but he has since left journalism. He

describes mainstream coverage of Gaza as "the worst media scandal in my lifetime," and he says this is one reason he decided to walk away from the field altogether, alongside the fact that "the industry was falling apart and I just didn't see a future in it anymore."

He was a rising star for the *LA Times*. He had helped work on a group investigation about the failures of the cannabis industry earlier in 2023 that was a Pulitzer finalist, taking second place. But, in the days after October 7 and the viral "beheaded baby" story on October 10, he expressed skepticism on social media about the story's substance, and raised concerns about other salacious stories prolifically purveyed by US press outlets, including allegations of mass rape. He was subject to a sophisticated harassment and doxing campaign by vigilante pro-Israel groups, and then faced informal retaliation from management for signing an open letter calling for the protection of journalists in Gaza, along with other signatories.

Elmahrek told us over Zoom that he pushed back on the beheaded baby story publicly "and really challenged its veracity and whether it had been really vetted. And when I did that, the backlash that I got outside the newsroom and inside the newsroom was just insane. My house was doxxed. We got death threats. My then wife, her name was doxxed, where she lived. And the pushback inside the newsroom was equally as intense."

"Colleagues told me what I did was inappropriate and the timing was bad," Elmahrek recalls. "For me, it's just about basic fact-checking. If one side is going to make such an insane claim, that babies are being beheaded, they have to be able to back it up to substantiate it. You can't just print it or broadcast it without any vetting at all."

In mainstream newsrooms throughout the US, the message to reporters wanting to challenge the prevailing narrative was received loud and clear: Context and history were to be omitted, and if they were mentioned one had to give Martin Fletcher's cheesy pro-Israel narrative of the history. Any horrific story about Palestinian violence—no matter how thinly sourced or racially coded—was permissible. Because without history there is no motivation, and without motivation all that's left is nihilistic bloodlust on the part of Palestinians.

By contrast, in the weeks after the October 7 attack, US media were quick to pass along any alleged "Israeli intelligence" without skepticism, framing it in sensationalist, uncritical terms (we will detail Israeli intelligence laundering more in Chapter 4). One particularly credulous breaking news story—indexed under "investigations" in the URL, despite requiring zero investigating from NBC since Israeli officials just handed them the story—was an October 13, 2023, article, "'Top Secret' Hamas Documents Show That Terrorists Intentionally Targeted Elementary Schools and a Youth Center."[31] The report, by Anna Schecter, went viral on social media, appearing to confirm the narrative that Hamas deliberately set out to harm children as part of their campaign of nihilistic antisemitic violence. An accompanying nightly news report that same day would air the shocking revelation. "Tonight, chilling new details," NBC's Raf Sanchez somberly reported, "on how Hamas terrorists deliberately targeted Israeli schools and youth centers in their hunt for hostages."[32]

There were, of course, no schools or youth centers targeted on October 7, but "Israeli intelligence" could nevertheless give the impression that there was by passing along supposed "top secret" plans for such an attack, allegedly found on dead Hamas fighters. The number of children killed on October 7 ended up being 40 (obviously 40 too many), but it amounted to about 3 percent of the total deaths.[33] In contrast, of the Palestinians Israel would go on to kill in Gaza, about 30 percent of them were children, totaling well over 18,500.[34] Whether the "top secret" plans NBC News reported on were real, or fake documents Israeli concocted (like other confirmed fake intelligence Israel cooked up), is unknowable.[35] But what's worth highlighting is that (1) no other outlet independently reported on the documents, and NBC News never did any follow-up reporting on them. (2) NBC News did not make any effort to have the documents independently confirmed. Nor did it say they were not independently confirmed. (3) NBC News did not note that Israeli officials have an obvious incentive to plant such a document and a long history of intelligence manipulation. Baseline journalistic skepticism was thrown out the window, and any claim made

about Hamas, no matter how self-serving or lurid, would be published without an ounce of incredulity.

IMMEDIATE, WIDESPREAD ADOPTION OF HAMAS MASS RAPE CLAIMS AND A DOUBLE STANDARD ON REPORTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

For the purpose of this book, we will not litigate the specifics around various allegations and counter-allegations that there were incidents of sexual violence on October 7. Each individual allegation must be investigated with meticulous and painstaking research and corroboration that goes way beyond the scope of this book. But we will scrutinize the immediate adoption of a broader claim, and one of far greater consequence—that systematic rape was part of Hamas' "terror strategy" on October 7. The obvious implication of this, like with the "beheaded babies" claim, is that it was evidence of an organization for which any political settlement or ceasefire is not only impossible but morally objectionable. Evidence for the utility of this narrative was on full display in the days just after October 7, when it was repeated from the *Los Angeles Times*[36] to *Newsweek*[37] to the president of the United States,[38] even before the Israeli government offered any evidence for it.

Others have done detailed work of poking holes in the methodology of the most blockbuster and consequential of these reports—"'Screams Without Words': How Hamas Weaponized Sexual Violence on Oct. 7," published in the *New York Times* on December 28, 2023.[39] In addition to skeptical analysis in *Mondoweiss* and *Electronic Intifada*, the *Intercept*'s Jeremy Scahill, Ryan Grim, and Daniel Boguslaw wrote a critical story on February 28, 2024, laying out the sloppy reporting standards employed by the *New York Times*, including the use of a heretofore obscure freelancer, Anat Schwartz, with a history of approving of genocidal rhetoric on social media. On October 7, Schwartz liked a tweet that Israel needed to "turn the strip into a slaughterhouse," something the *New York Times* did not feel disqualified her from reporting on the conflict. Contrast this with the dozens of Arab and Palestinian

journalists, whom we will detail later in the book, who were fired, taken off the Gaza beat, reprimanded, or otherwise sanctioned for making generic statements about Palestinian suffering on social media. As the *Intercept* noted, shifting claims made by key witnesses and other discredited, since-debunked claims did not merit mention in the *New York Times* report.[40] Four months later, in March of 2024, the *New York Times* would partially walk back its own reporting, writing,

> New video has surfaced that undercuts the account of an Israeli military paramedic who said two teenagers killed in the Hamas-led terrorist attack on Oct. 7 were sexually assaulted. The unnamed paramedic, from an Israeli commando unit, was among dozens of people interviewed for a Dec. 28 article by the *New York Times* that examined sexual violence on Oct. 7.[41]

According to another report in the *Intercept*, published in January 2024, there were internal divisions about the veracity of "Screams Without Words," culminating in the *New York Times*' flagship *The Daily* podcast reportedly declining to do a segment on it over concerns about its credibility. The sloppiness, poor sourcing, and obvious bias of "Screams Without Words" is not *per se* evidence that no sexual assault took place on October 7. But it does speak to an ideological motivation at work and the lowering of editorial standards when a story helped fuel Israel's so-called "war on Hamas."[42]

Even if one were to believe the most maximalist of claims that Hamas used rape as a weapon of war on October 7, there remains a staggering double standard in both coverage and selective outrage. There are numerous credible reports that the Israeli military employed widespread sexual abuse on Palestinian captives. In fact, the body of evidence is far greater in that it's been confirmed by Israeli courts and recorded on video.[43] Yet there were only two total mentions of Israel committing acts of rape against Palestinians on CNN and MSNBC in the relevant time frame. (To be as fair as possible, we examined the first three months of the conflict and three months in late summer 2024, when reporting on Israeli

prisoner sexual abuse against Palestinians reached its peak.) This is in stark contrast with the 502 on-air mentions of Palestinians engaging in mass rape against Israelis. Print media outlets the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Politico*, and *Axios* mentioned Israelis sexually abusing Palestinians a total of nine times (four in the *New York Times*, five in the *Washington Post*, zero in *Axios* and *Politico*). By contrast, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Politico*, and *Axios* made mention of Palestinian rapes of Israelis 128 times (76 in the *New York Times*, 22 in the *Washington Post*, 24 in *Politico*, and six in *Axios*).

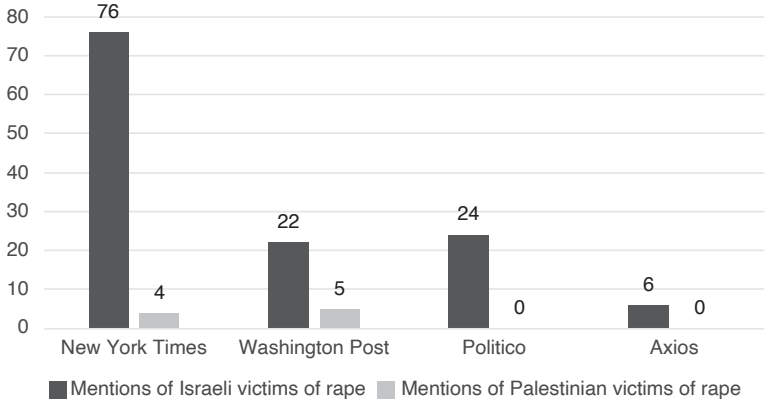

Figure 1.1 Mentions of victims of rape in print media in both the first three months of the conflict and three months in late summer 2024, when reporting on Israeli prisoner sexual abuse against Palestinians reached its peak.

Regardless of what one believes, it's clear that the issue of rape was selectively invoked and weaponized. Why were the far more documented cases of the Israeli military raping Palestinians rendered a nonstory, virtually never mentioned in print or cable news, while claims of mass rape on October 7, claims that can only serve to fuel an ongoing campaign of destruction and death in Gaza, were given widespread, nonstop outrage and indignation? The answer is that one supported the moral logic of a US–Israeli campaign of bombing and siege warfare, the other countered this narrative and

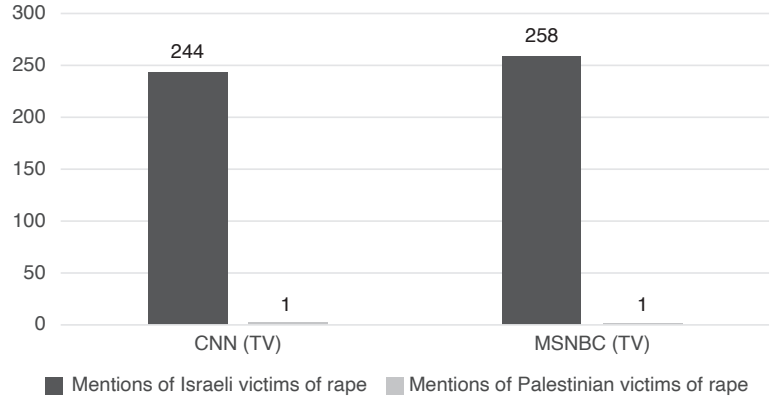

Figure 1.2 Mentions of victims of rape in TV media in both the first three months of the conflict and three months in late summer 2024, when reporting on Israeli prisoner sexual abuse against Palestinians reached its peak.

was thus inconvenient and unworthy of mention. It is impossible to avoid the fact that completely one-sided discussions of rape have been used at the most pivotal moments since October 7, 2023, to justify further escalation of Israel's aggression. And these are allegations that particularly resonate with liberal-leaning components of Biden's base, the ones that may have otherwise exerted pressure to stop US support for Israel.

ONCE INDEXED AS ISIS 2.0, POLITICAL SOLUTIONS, NAMELY CEASEFIRES, BECOME UNTHINKABLE

The simplistic premise that negotiating with Palestinian militants was a Politically Unserious position because they are cartoonish, mindless terrorists quickly became liberal conventional wisdom, even among supposed progressives in Congress. When asked by reporters in late 2023 if he supported a lasting ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, progressive standard-bearer Senator Bernie Sanders rejected the premise. He told CNN on November 5, "I don't know how you can have a permanent ceasefire with an organization like Hamas." And on December 10, he told CBS's *Face the Nation*,

"I don't know how you have a permanent cease-fire with Hamas, who has said before October 7 and after October 7 that they want to destroy Israel."[44]

Sanders' media statements rejecting the premise that a permanent ceasefire between Israel and Hamas was possible were proudly clipped and shared by right-wing pro-Israel lobby American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) on social media. "Thank you @SenSanders for your strong opposition to a permanent ceasefire with Hamas," read one tweet from December 2023.[45] Long-time Sanders foreign policy advisor and ally Matt Duss, Executive Vice President at the Center for International Policy, propped up Sanders' anti-permanent-ceasefire position at the time, telling Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now!* on November 9, 2023,[46] "What the senator said there about the challenge of a ceasefire being negotiated with an organization like Hamas are valid." The Center for International Policy, which was viewed by many in Washington as the left pole of acceptable political ideas, would drag its feet for weeks, defending on October 20, "Israel's right to take security actions that are appropriately targeted and otherwise adhere to international law to defend itself against and degrade Hamas." The organization only called for "a temporary cessation in fighting" on October 15. Then, on October 20, it used the c-word but did not call for it to be permanent—demanding only a "temporary ceasefire to facilitate steps to prevent further harm to civilians."

Sanders and the Center for International Policy would later quietly walk back their non-support for a permanent ceasefire. Sanders would call for an immediate ceasefire in Spring 2024, and while he stopped actively opposing a permanent one in principle, he never explicitly supported one either (despite, to his credit, long-demanding the US cut arm sales to the "Netanyahu war machine"). And the Center for International Policy would drop its use of "temporary" in late 2023, though it's unclear when it arrived at this position. (Duss publicly argued there was no meaningful difference between a "humanitarian pause" and a "ceasefire,"[47] a claim aggressively refuted at the time by Doctors Without Borders and Amnesty International, among others). Neither the Center for International Policy

nor Sanders ever explained why they had changed their positions. Indeed, as the brutality and manifest nihilism of Israel's war machine became too obvious to deny, the idea that Israel should enter into a lasting ceasefire with Hamas went from a fringe Far-Left position to Center-Left conventional wisdom seemingly overnight, with no explanation and even less fanfare, culminating with a nominal endorsement by the White House in late February 2024 (though, as we will discuss in Chapter 3, this was left deliberately vague).

But it is hard to overstate the time that was bought for Israel by the taboo against a lasting ceasefire with Hamas. This conventional wisdom provided significant breathing room from October 2023 into the Spring of 2024 for the White House to support an all-out assault and invasion of Gaza. The *ISIS-ification* of Hamas, reducing them to one-note jihadists without any political demands or grievances, was central to establishing the collective callousness needed to wave away the nonstop images of dead Palestinian children streamed across people's social media timelines. *Israel couldn't stop their "war," the US couldn't condition their support*, we were told, *because Hamas had engaged in baby beheadings, mass rapes, and other crimes that made leaving them in power impossible.* All allowance for unprecedented brutality followed from this premise, and the "beheaded babies" hoax was central to establishing this premise. It didn't matter that it would later be walked back, that tweets would be deleted, and tepid apologies issued. It had served its purpose, as did the major media outlets that echoed it without the most basic journalistic skepticism.

2
Who is allowed to be human?

Within hours of the October 7 attack, pro-Israel reporters, politicians, and commentators needed to exceptionalize Palestinian violence and create a tiered moral system that indexed October 7 as something morally distinct from both Israeli violence of the past and what would no doubt be an unprecedented "military response" by Israel. In addition to the campaign to *ISIS-ify* Hamas laid out in Chapter 1, the three mechanisms to achieve this exceptionalizing were (1) the almost entirely lopsided use of emotive words to describe the killing of Israelis versus the killing of Palestinians; (2) reflexively prefacing the majority of statements about Palestinian civilian deaths with claims of Palestinian war crimes while systematically ignoring well-documented crimes by Israelis; and (3) an overall rhetorical regime that humanized Israelis and dehumanized Palestinians. The general impression—borne from a premise swiftly adopted by both pundits and ostensibly objective news reporters—was that Palestinians killed for the purposes of sadistic pleasure and racial hatred, while Israelis kill reluctantly, as part of a broader ends-justify-the-means strategy to "rescue hostages" or—as many would explicitly state—for the sake of their own existential survival.

This tiered moral system was essential for rationalizing the carnage that would very soon begin emerging from Gaza, mostly through social media platforms like Twitter/X, TikTok, and Telegram. Over and over again, US media would make clear that dead Israelis were the result of ontologically evil indifference to human life and religious extremism, whereas dead Palestinians were the result of, at worst, a traumatized people "overreacting" and, more often than not, reluctant military necessity. It didn't matter that the civilian death toll quickly ballooned from 1:1 to 1:10 to 1:100.[1] It didn't

matter that social media evidence of deliberate war crimes would pile up by the hundreds.[2] It didn't matter that top Israeli officials would make genocidal threats from the onset, in English.[3] This fundamental moral distinction, the premise that Palestinians were mindless terrorists while Israel killed only because *it had no choice*, would never be meaningfully challenged by any pundit or journalist in mainstream US media.

This strict media dogma, this moral tier system, would manifest in very glaring double standards for how death and killing were positioned. In this chapter, we will show evidence for this double standard, analyze media editors' and reporters' nonsensical responses when presented with this evidence. We will explain the racialized framework being pandered to—both consciously and subconsciously—and detail how these rhetorical clichés and frameworks subtly prime liberals to support the politics of mass death.

EVIDENCE FOR DOUBLE STANDARDS IN REPORTING AND COMMENTARY

The general premise that US media is biased against Palestinians isn't, we will argue, lefty dogma or a vague feeling driven by ideological preferences. It is an empirical claim that can be proven conclusively. A good place to start is to analyze the one-sided use of emotive words to describe the killing of Israelis versus the killing of Palestinians.

Our analysis of cable networks CNN and MSNBC, and print/online outlets the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, the *Washington Post*, CNN.com, *Politico*, *USA Today*, and *Axios* found a consistent double standard in the usage of the emotive terms "massacre," "barbaric," "savage," and "slaughter," to describe the killing of civilians.

By October 11, 2023, the civilian death toll in Gaza had passed that of the October 7 attack,[4] but the rising death count and humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza did not get the sympathetic, emotive treatment afforded to the victims of the October 7 attack. By the end of our 100-day survey sample for print media on January 14,

2024, the official Palestinian death toll was roughly 24,000—with an estimated 70 percent of the victims being women and children.[5] Nevertheless, over that 100-day survey period, the use of emotive words was almost entirely one-sided in favor of Israel.

(Note: this count is conservative in that it does not include quotes from US and Israeli officials or outside commentators. The count is only the terms being used outside of quotes—it is editorial language used in ostensibly straight factual reporting.)

In print/online media outlets the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, the *Washington Post*, CNN.com, *Politico*, *USA Today*, and *Axios*, the term "massacre" was used to describe Palestinians killing Israelis 344 times, versus never for Israelis killing Palestinians. (An Associated Press article from November 20, 2023, summarizing the position of Pakistani Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, stated "[the prime minister] described the killing of children in Israeli strikes in Gaza as a massacre.")[6] The use of "barbaric" was used 14 times to describe the killing of Israelis versus zero times for Palestinians. The term "savage" was used 16 times to describe the killing of Israelis versus zero times for Palestinians, and the term "slaughter" was used 120 times for the killing of Israelis and only once for Palestinians, for a total respectively of 494 to 0, or a ratio of 531-to-3.

Data analysis indicates the *New York Times* has an editorial practice, either formally or informally, of referring to the October 7 attack as a "massacre" but never doing so for any of the myriad war crimes carried out by Israel. The publication used the label 124 times in our 100-day survey period to describe Palestinians killing Israelis, but never once used the term to describe any of the hundreds of discrete bombings, mass shootings, and other acts of deliberate violence targeting Palestinian civilians. Just the same, CNN.com referred to the October 7 attack as a massacre 43 times, and the *Washington Post* 50 times, but neither ever referred to any Israeli mass killing events as "massacres."

Often, for the *New York Times*, the double standards in emotive language were evident in the same paragraph. "Violent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians have cut both ways in terms of

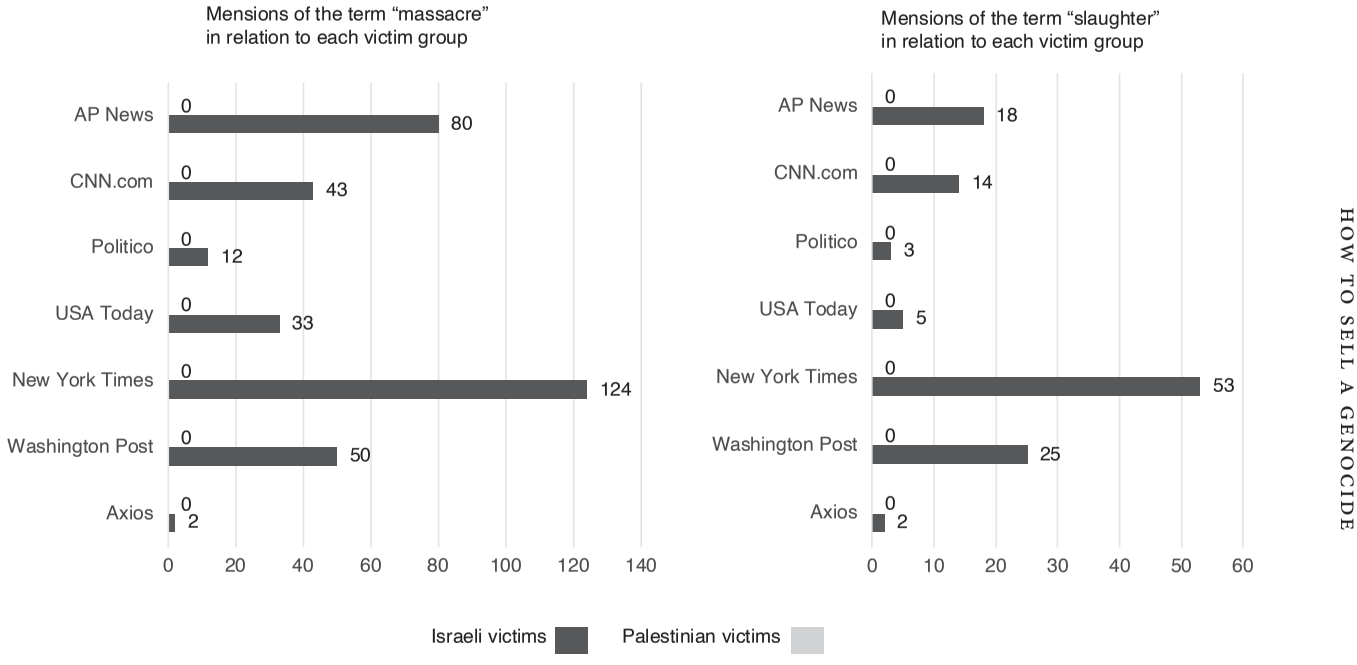

Figure 2.1a Emotive terms used about Palestinian and Israeli victims during the first 100 days of the conflict in print media.

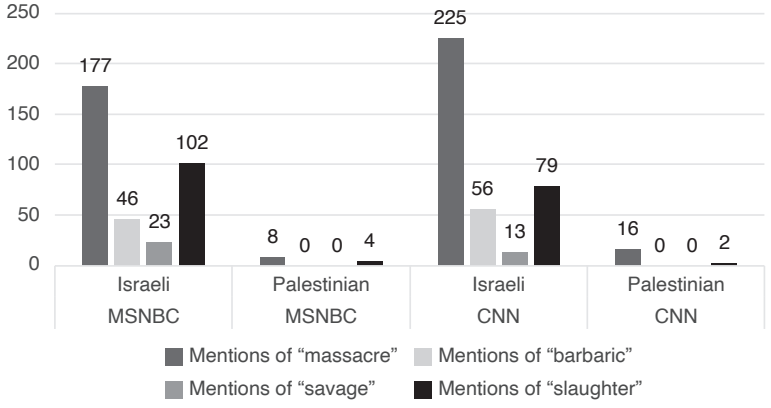

Figure 2.1b Emotive terms used about Palestinian and Israeli victims during the first 100 days of the conflict on TV.

influencing subsequent peace efforts," wrote reporter Mark Landler on November 1, 2023. "The barbaric nature of the Hamas attacks and the ferocity of the Israeli military response in Gaza, experts said, makes the coming debate in Israel particularly unpredictable." Hamas "attacks" "barbarically," Israel "responds" "ferociously."[7]

Narrowing our scope to the first 30 days of each conflict for cable news, we see a similar glaring double standard. MSNBC anchors, guests, and reporters used the term "massacre" 177 times, "barbaric" 46 times, "savage" 23 times, and "slaughter" 102 times in reference to Israelis being killed, namely on October 7. The killing of Palestinians was never called "barbaric" or "savage," and was referred to as a "massacre" eight times and "slaughter" four times, for a difference of 348 to 12, or a ratio of 29 to 1.

CNN had a similar breakdown: In the first 30 days of the conflict, its anchors, guests, and reporters referred to the killing of Israelis as a "massacre" 225 times, "barbaric" 56 times, "savage" 13 times, and "slaughter" 79 times. Israel's killing of Palestinian civilians—despite being almost three times greater by the end of the survey period—was never called "barbaric" or "savage." It was referred to as a "massacre" 16 times and a "slaughter" twice—both when playing a clip from the Palestinian representative to the UN in reference to

the bombing of the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital on October 17, for a difference of 373 to 18, or a ratio of 21 to 1.

A similar discrepancy can be seen in reference to the use of "human shields." "Human shields" or "human shielding" was used to describe alleged actions by Palestinians 888 different times on CNN and MSNBC, despite the fact that human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, have long rejected this false and broad definition of "human shielding."[8] Despite numerous documented cases

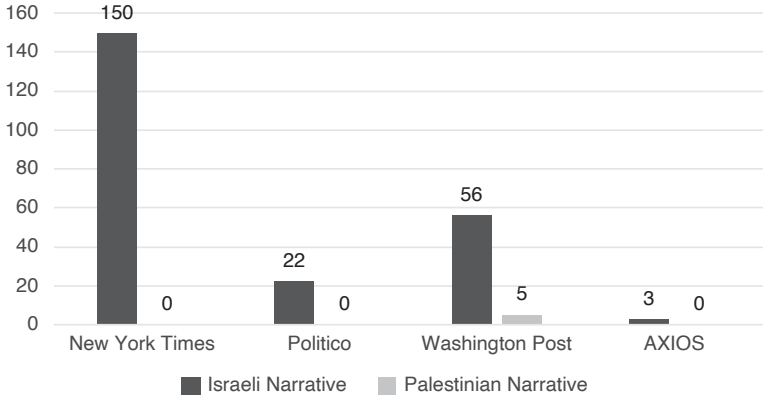

Figure 2.2a Usage of "human shield(s)" in both Israeli and Palestinian narratives during first year of conflict in print media.

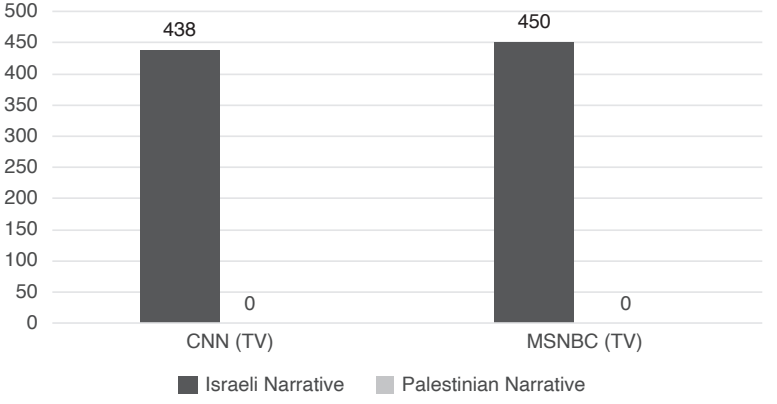

Figure 2.2b Usage of "human shield(s)" in both Israeli and Palestinian narratives during first year of conflict on TV.

of the Israeli military actually using Palestinians as human shields,[9] in the way the term is defined in International Humanitarian Law, reports of Israel doing so were mentioned on-air zero times on CNN and MSNBC during our survey period.

Print media was just as one-sided. When it comes to references to the use of "human shields" or "human shielding" by Israel in the first year of the conflict in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Politico*, and *Axios*, there were only five—all in the *Washington Post*. In contrast, mentions of "human shields" or "human shielding" by Palestinian militants were 231 (the *New York Times*: 150; *Washington Post*: 56, *Politico*: 22, *Axios* 3).

The constant invocation of the mantra that Israel has a "right to defend itself," typically followed by the rationalization of mass civilian killing, was a right only said to exist for Israelis. On CNN and MSNBC, guests, anchors, and reporters said Israelis possessed such rights on-air 755 times, and only eight times for Palestinians. In print/online, Israel was said to have the "right to defend itself" 459 times and Palestinians were said to possess such a right only four times.

One common retort to this double standard is that Israel doesn't intentionally kill civilians or otherwise engage in war crimes on purpose or as policy, whereas Hamas does—by definition. But this

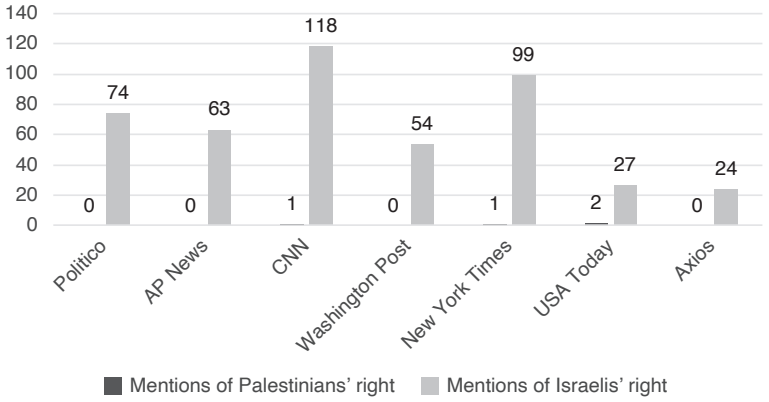

Figure 2.3 Mentions of Israelis' and Palestinians' "right to defend" themselves.

assertion is based entirely on unsubstantiated conventional wisdom and is belied by all available evidence—evidence widely known to editors and journalists at the time these editorial choices were being made in the early months of the assault on Gaza.

Aside from the fact that IDF personnel routinely filmed themselves committing textbook war crimes, their use of human shields[10] and prisoner sexual abuse is beyond dispute.[11] There were numerous reports from third-party organizations as varied as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Oxfam, the UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and even the US State Department,[12] documenting the deliberate targeting of civilians and the use of collective punishment. The International Court of Justice's January 26, 2024, ruling, announced days after our survey period, laid out several points of evidence showing the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure. Law for Palestine, a group of legal researchers, has collected over 100 pieces of evidence detailing Israeli officials' genocidal intent,[13] including top Israeli officials expressing their intent to depopulate Gaza and engage in collective punishment:

- October 9, 2023: "I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly"—Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.[14]
- October 13, 2023: "It is an entire nation out there that is responsible. It is not true this rhetoric about civilians not being aware, not involved. It's absolutely not true. They could have risen up. They could have fought against that evil regime which took over Gaza in a coup d'etat"—Israeli President Isaac Herzog.[15]
- October 28, 2023: "You must remember what Amalek has done to you, says our Holy Bible—we do remember"—Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, referring to the ancient enemy of the Israelites, in scripture interpreted by scholars as a call to exterminate their "men and women, children and infants."[16]

Civilians being shredded by bombs and subjected to a policy of collective punishment via starvation, nonstop displacement, and disease is no less "brutal," "savage," or "barbaric" than civilians being shot at close range by a militant with a gun (though, to be clear, Israeli forces do this as well).[17] Yet only one side's violence is presented as a sadistic, hate-fueled end in and of itself. There is no clear journalistic reason to make this moral delineation other than chauvinist editorializing.

THE AL-AHLI ARAB HOSPITAL BOMBING ON OCTOBER 17, 2023, A PRO-ISRAEL BULLYING CAMPAIGN, AND WHOLE NEW *AD HOC* STANDARDS FOR PALESTINIANS

On the evening of October 17, 2023, an "explosion" on the edge of the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City killed over 250 Palestinians, the majority seeking refuge in a tent camp in the hospital parking lot.[18] Major outlets like CNN and the *New York Times* justifiably assumed the military entity dropping 99.99 percent of the bombs on Gaza was the responsible party, and blamed the IDF for the "airstrike" in their headlines with a standard "Gaza Officials Say" qualifier. Within hours, major—sometimes violent—protests erupted in cities throughout the Arab world, and US officials were anxious to justify and explain away the carnage streaming live on TVs and social media.

Israel, of course, contested its responsibility, using as evidence a supposed intercepted phone recording between Palestinian militants where they openly chat about their alleged mistake. Within hours, a Channel 4 investigation found the recording to be "fake" and, paraphrasing experts, the report determined it employed "absurd" Arabic "tone, syntax, accent and idiom."[19] (In February 2024, the London-based *Forensic Architecture*, which uses architectural techniques to investigate cases of state violence, led by British-Israeli architect Eyal Weizman, documented half a dozen disputed claims made by Israel about the bombing).[20] Regardless, under pressure from the White House, the Israeli government and pro-Israel groups, US media largely validated the "errant Islamic

Jihad rocket" narrative or, at best, indexed the "explosion" as "Fog-of-War," he said/he said mystery that could never be known one way or the other. The fact that, according to the *New York Times*, over 1,500 Hamas/PIJ rockets made impact in Israel in the first three months of the conflict and killed only 15 people,[21] but one errant PIJ rocket landed in Gaza and killed about 250 in a single strike, was not something that invited skepticism or further inquiry as the assault on Gaza dragged on. The heat was too intense, and the emerging editorial ethos to calm tensions throughout the Arab world and toe the line of the White House won the day.

"Somehow Israel managed to control the narrative with that doctored, manufactured audio," one CNN source told us, "then Biden came out and basically supported it, and that was that."

What could have been a galvanizing moment for global opinion to marshal support to end the ongoing mass killing and eventual genocide, to tell Israel to call it quits and seek a political solution to the occupation, was inverted, with essential assistance from US media, into the exact opposite: a deeply cynical spectacle supposedly showing anti-Israel bias in US media that would have deadly consequences in the coming months. Within hours of Israel pushing back on their responsibility, pro-Israel pundits and outlets jumped on the supposed ambiguity of attribution for the attacks and began a successful crybully campaign that resulted in two major outcomes, to varying degrees, throughout US media:

(1) Entirely novel editorial standards of attribution for IDF attacks, requiring positive confirmation from the IDF and GPS coordinate location.[22] This standard would be invented, namely by CNN and the *New York Times*, after October 17, 2023, and only apply to one country on earth: Israel.
(2) The introduction of the pejorative qualifier "Hamas-run" or "Hamas-controlled" Health Ministry to discredit the increasingly ballooning death count and on-the-ground descriptions of the daily horrors emanating out of Gaza.

On the issue of novel editorial standards requiring positive confirmation from the Israeli military for airstrikes, shellings, killings, and other acts of violence, this was unprecedented, according to one high-level CNN source. "I have not seen that type of bar being set so high for anything else," our source told us when asked if he had seen a similar policy in his over a decade of reporting and producing stories for CNN.

> Whether it's in the newsroom or in the field, [after Oct 17] we couldn't credit anything to Israel unless we were held to this impossibly high bar of having to call it an "explosion," until we geolocated the site of the explosion, sent the coordinates to the Israelis and asked them for comment.

When asked if he had seen a similar standard in the other conflicts he had worked in, namely Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he simply replied, "Never, never, never, never, never."

This new editorial standard was first reported by Daniel Boguslaw in the *Intercept* in January 2024. Quoting a different CNN source, the staff member told Boguslaw, "Israeli bombings in Gaza will be reported as 'blasts' attributed to nobody, until the Israeli military weighs in to either accept or deny responsibility."[23]

On (2), the issue of "Hamas-run" or "Hamas-controlled" pejorative to discredit death counts, one can see this shift qualitatively, namely at CNN and MSNBC, just after the Al-Ahli Hospital bombing. In our 100-day survey period, CNN used the "Hamas-run" label and related terms 277 times and MSNBC used it 146 times, despite neither using it once between October 7, 2023 and October 17, 2023.

This policy, which both my data analysis and CNN sources confirm came into practice immediately after the Al-Ahli Hospital bombing on October 17, was further codified in a memo sent out to CNN staff nine days later. As Boguslaw reported for the *Intercept*, CNN's News Standards and Practices division sent an email to staff on October 26 detailing the shift in editorial policy:

Figure 2.4 Mentions of "Hamas-run Ministry of Health" (and variants) in the first 100 days on TV.

> Hamas controls the government in Gaza and we should describe the Ministry of Health as "Hamas-controlled" whenever we are referring to casualty statistics or other claims related to the present conflict. If the underlying statistics have been derived from the Ministry of Health in Gaza, we should note that fact and that this part of the Ministry is "Hamas-controlled" even if the statistics are released by the West Bank part of the ministry or elsewhere.

This is despite the fact that several third-party human rights organizations, including the WHO and Human Rights Watch, had long used Gaza Health Ministry figures—as had the US State Department—for years.[24] But this didn't stop the scary qualifiers from being employed to appease pro-Israel pressure groups and media higher-ups. Needless to say, no comparable skeptical label was used when citing death totals provided by Israeli authorities; they were simply asserted as facts—even though, for instance, Israel repeatedly revised the October 7 death toll down from "about 1,400" to just under 1,200.[25]

The *New York Times* engaged in another glaring double standard when it came to counting the dead: they not-so-subtly cast doubt on the Palestinian death toll by insisting, in 52 different articles during our time frame, that the death total did not "distinguish between civilians and combatants." They did so without noting that their Israeli death total, almost always cited side-by-side with the Palestinian death count, didn't either. "Hamas and other groups killed roughly 1,200 people and took 250 hostages during a surprise attack on Israel," reads one typical breakdown by Liam Stack. "In the war that followed, Israel … killed more than 47,000 people, according to local health officials, whose count does not distinguish between civilians and combatants."[26]

But 373 of the 1,139 killed in Israel on October 7 were military.[27] The 1,200 figure doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants either, so why do the Palestinian figures get this qualifier but the Israeli ones don't? A more overtly dehumanizing example was published by *New York Times* Jerusalem Bureau Chief Patrick Kingsley (co-bylined with Bilal Shbair) on August 17, 2025. "Israel's military

operation, which began after the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023," Kingsley wrote in his article on child deaths in Gaza, "has killed more than 18,000 Palestinians under the age of 18, according to the Gazan health authorities, who do not distinguish between civilians and combatants."[28] The obvious implication, that some unknown number of dead children were, in fact, "combatants" entirely negates any shred of Palestinian humanity the surrounding article may have conveyed. We asked the *New York Times*' Standards Editors to explain this obvious double standard, but when they returned our email they ignored this specific question.

SHUTTING OUT PALESTINIAN AND ARAB VOICES THAT REFUSE TO TOE THE LIBERAL ZIONIST LINE

Since October 7, 2023, prominent Palestinians and Arabs have been shut out of media platforms in a manner that has often been abrupt and insulting. Noura Erakat is a Palestinian-American human rights attorney and an associate professor at Rutgers University. For years, she has been featured on major media outlets, but this changed after October 7, 2023. On October 12, CBS News Streaming asked Erakat to do an interview for *Prime Time with John Dickerson*, which is featured online, on apps, and on Pluto TV and Paramount+. According to journalist Mari Cohen, internal CBS discussions reviewed by the Jewish Currents show that "employees at CBS had prioritized booking Erakat in part because the show had not included any Palestinian guests in its coverage of the region during the previous three days."[29] But when the interview was published online, it included an omission: footage in which Erakat pushed back against how the interviewer (Jeff Glor, filling in for Dickerson) was describing Israel's operations.

In the livestreamed version, Glor described the October 7 attacks as "barbarian." Erakat responded by asking why Israel's actions are not described this way. And when Glor said Hamas started the conflict, Erakat asked him if he was justifying Israeli war crimes. But key responses from Erakat, who is renowned for her debating

skills and knowledge of the conflict, were cut from the version posted online.

Citing an unnamed source who is familiar with internal decision-making, Cohen reported that "CBS News Streaming's senior vice president Anthony Galloway, as well as vice president and managing editor Robert Gifford, made the decision not to post the clip on the network's website because they thought that the interview was too combative and that it had made Glor, the anchor, look bad."

"Rather than just answer questions about how bad things are, I talked about media responsibility for perpetuating racist and Islamophobic tropes that have basically fomented war," Erakat told Cohen. She added, "They wanted me to be up there to lament our dead, but not to establish international responsibility for [their deaths]."

Erakat has had other insulting experiences. When she went on MSNBC's Katy Tur Reports, she pushed back against questions that were entirely focused on Hamas. Writing on October 21, 2023, for the *Guardian*, she recalled to journalist Chris McGreal,[30]

> I thought that it was necessary to underscore that there isn't a military option to defeat Hamas because Hamas is not comprised of ideologues but primarily of young men who had grown up most of their lives under siege and systematic warfare who had not been given a shred of hope.

According to Erakat, "I received word that after the show the top executive had returned to the booking producer and said that the list of experts I was on would now be scrutinised because of the mistake of bringing me on."

Erakat wasn't alone. On October 16, 2023, Omar Baddar, a prominent Palestinian-American political analyst, posted on Twitter/X, "I was recently booked & repeatedly confirmed on a major network. Day of, I was asked to summarize what I planned to say. When I obliged (US shouldn't support war crimes, we need a cease fire, Palestinians need freedom, etc.), the producer said they could no longer squeeze me in."[31]

Even the most generic and humanist social media posts commenting on Palestinian suffering were swiftly seized on by pro-Israel bully organizations and media. As the *Guardian*'s McGreal also noted, the editor-in-chief of *Harper's Bazaar*, Samira Nasr—who is of Lebanese descent—came under intense scrutiny and harassment for expressing concern for Palestinians after Israel shut down essential services to Gaza, including food, water, and electricity. "Cutting off water and electricity to 2.2 million civilians … This is the most inhuman thing I've seen in my life," Nasr wrote on her Instagram Story. McGreal reported that after a backlash within *Harper's Bazaar* and the fashion industry, accusing Nasr of minimizing October 7, she issued an apology for her "deeply insensitive and hurtful comments" and assured critics she was "not in any way sympathetic" to Hamas.

PALESTINIAN "PRISONERS" VERSUS ISRAELI "HOSTAGES," PALESTINIAN "MINORS" VERSUS ISRAELI "CHILDREN"

Reading the US media, one would hardly know that Israel keeps, and has kept for years, over 3,000 Palestinian captives without charge. Even setting aside the over 10,000 Palestinians who have been charged and found guilty by an occupation military court that has no international legitimacy, these extreme cases of "administrative detention"—which meet any neutral definition of hostage-taking[32]—are rarely reported on, much less framed in these terms. These are Palestinians (147 of whom are children as of June 2025),[33] kidnapped from their homes or off the streets, not formally accused of a crime, presented with no evidence, given no trial, held indefinitely, often tortured and sexually assaulted, and used as bargaining chips by the Israeli government. But they are simply referred to, by all mainstream media, generically as "prisoners" or "detainees."

In a one-year survey of MSNBC and CNN's coverage, the term "hostage" was used 46,585 times, virtually all in reference to Israelis (27,518 on CNN, 19,067 on MSNBC). And the term "prisoner" was used 3,947 times, virtually all in reference to Palestinians (2,441 on CNN and 1,515 on MSNBC). In print media, the term "hostage"

or "kidnapped" was used 30,237 times in 8,288 articles virtually all in reference to Israelis or those living in Israel (CNN: 7,760, *New York Times*: 7,384, Associated Press: 5,606, *Washington Post*: 3,925, *USA Today*: 2,093, *Politico*: 1,812, *Axios*: 1,657). During the same one-year survey period, the word "prisoner" or "detain" was used 6,420 times in 3,094 articles virtually all in reference to Palestinians (CNN: 1,920, *New York Times*: 1,317, Associated Press: 1,178, *Washington Post*: 922, *USA Today*: 335, *Politico*: 570, *Axios*: 178).

Virtually all mentions of "Palestinian prisoners" were in the context of their value to free "Israeli hostages." With rare exception, they were never reported on or mentioned as something in and of themselves worthy of news interest, much less moral indignation. There were, of course, no instances of Palestinians being referred to as "hostages" despite Israel detaining roughly 3,000 Palestinians without any charge or due process and frequently using them as political bargaining chips with various Palestinian authorities.

Another glaring double standard is the frequency with which Israeli captives under the age of 18 were referred to as "children," but Palestinian captives under the age of 18 were referred to as "minors." There are dozens of such examples, but to best illustrate the absurdity of this convention, we will highlight ten examples of media outlets applying this double standard *in the exact same paragraph—and often in the same sentence.*

- *Axios*—November 21, 2023: "In the first phase of the two-phase deal, Hamas is expected to release 50 Israeli women and **children** held in Gaza, while Israel is expected to release around 150 Palestinian prisoners, mostly women and **minors**."[34]
- *New York Times*—November 21, 2023: "Negotiations around the release of Israeli women and **children** held hostage in Gaza have centered on an exchange for Palestinian women and **minors** held in Israeli prisons."[35]
- *Washington Post*—November 23, 2023: "Here's what to know: Hamas is expected to release civilian women and **children** who have been held hostage, and Israel is to release women and **minors** in Israeli prisons."[36]

- *New York Times*—November 23, 2023: "Israel and Hamas have been negotiating to clinch the final details of the agreement to exchange at least 50 women and **children** held in Gaza for 150 Palestinian women and **minors** imprisoned in Israeli jails."[37]
- *New York Times*—November 23, 2023: "… at least 50 women and **children**—from the roughly 240 people that Israeli officials say were abducted on Oct. 7—were expected to be exchanged for 150 Palestinian women and **minors** imprisoned in Israeli jails."[38]
- *New York Times*—November 27, 2023: "Hamas agreed to release 50 women and **children** taken hostage during the Oct. 7 attack. In return, Israel agreed to free 150 women and **minors** held in Israeli jails …"[39]
- CNN.com—November 27, 2023: "Hamas has so far released 69 hostages, primarily women and **children**. Israel has freed 150 Palestinians from prison, mainly women and **minors** …"[40]
- *New York Times*—December 1, 2023: "… 240 Palestinian women and **minors** held in Israeli prisons, many of who had not been convicted of crimes. The hostages released by Hamas were largely women and **children**."[41]
- *New York Times*—November 26, 2023: "Hamas agreed to free at least 50 hostages, all women and **children**, while Israel would release from its prisons 150 Palestinian women and **minors**, some of whom were detained for violent crimes."[42]
- Associated Press—January 26, 2024: "More than 100 [Israeli] hostages, mostly women and **children**, were released during a brief November cease-fire in exchange for the release of Palestinian women and **minors** imprisoned by Israel."[43]

There are more than a dozen instances of this same-paragraph double standard in the *New York Times* during our sample period, indicating it was an editorial standard at the publication.

One common rejoinder to this criticism is that Hamas and allied groups took captives under the age of 14, and Israel has no one in its prisons under the age of 14. Setting aside the numerous reports detailing the Israeli military's deliberate targeting of children under

the age of 14 for starvation and killing,[44] it is indeed true that Palestinian militants took two dozen Israelis under the age of 14 captive on October 7. But if this is a moral distinction editors wish to make, then they ought to have done so consistently by carving out a third category and referring to Israeli captives ages 14 to 17 as "minors." The over 300 Palestinian children held in prisons are just as much "children" as the dozen 14- to 17-year-old captives Hamas took, yet they are stripped of this descriptor and given the dehumanizing, sterilized "minor" label.

When I asked Standards Editors at the *New York Times* about their use of double standards, they responded, fittingly enough, by using a blatant double standard. "*The New York Times* has published a vast, empathetic, and independent body of more than 22,000 stories, photographs, and videos on the Israel–Hamas war that millions of people around the world turn to and trust every day," Managing Director for External Communications for the *New York Times*, Nicole Taylor, said in an email. "Our reporters have worked relentlessly on years-long investigations into the ferocious military campaign led by the Israeli government, published dozens of exclusive and deeply-sourced reports to reveal previously unknown details about the atrocities committed by Hamas, and sensitively exposed the humanitarian crisis facing communities in Gaza."

Note here how Hamas actively "commits atrocities," while Israel has a "ferocious military campaign," and Gaza (not Israel, with any agency) simply "faces" a "humanitarian crisis." The *New York Times* can't even avoid double standards when disputing claims that they use double standards. The rest of their reply would go on to use pro forma language about how the *New York Times* is *also* accused of being pro-Palestine, a mopey Golden Mean Fallacy response typical of those presented with manifest evidence of pro-Israel bias. "Several conflicting ideological studies have been published that purport to show bias or double standards in our coverage," their email would continue. "These studies typically sample words and headlines to support a worldview and ignore the context and facts offered by reading an article in its entirety as it's intended."

To which we replied, "Our study is consistent and has a clearly laid out methodology. The use of emotive language is an ideologically neutral way of measuring bias, and, based on this, your reporting is self-evidently biased. How else do you explain the wide discrepancy in the use of emotive words?"

The *New York Times* never replied to this response. In January 2024, Canadian outlet *Breach Media* documented a similar bias within the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC).[45] In response to Jeff Winch, a retired professor at Humber College who had filed four complaints about CBC's coverage with the CRTC, Canada's telecoms regulator, the Canadian broadcaster also gave an underwhelming, rambling justification, drowning in unchecked chauvinist tautology. CBC's Senior Manager of Journalistic Standards, Nancy Waugh's response is worth reading in full:

> You wrote that CBC reporters refer to the October 7 attacks as "murderous," "vicious," or "brutal," but don't use the same words to describe Israeli attacks that kill Palestinians. Different words are used because although both result in death and injury, the events they describe are very different. The raid saw Hamas gunmen stream through the border fence and attack Israelis directly with firearms, knives and explosives. Gunmen chased down festival goers, assaulted kibbutzniks then shot them, fought hand to hand, and threw grenades. The attack was brutal, often vicious, and certainly murderous. Bombs dropped from thousands of feet and artillery shells lofted into Gaza from kilometers away result in death and destruction on a massive scale, but it is carried out remotely. The deadly results are unseen by those who caused them and the source unseen by those [who] suffer and die.
>
> It's a different kind of event and is described differently as "intensive," "unrelenting," and "punishing," raining death and destruction on one of the most densely populated places on earth … They are different stories, and we have tried to describe both accurately and vividly.

In short, it's different because it's different. But what are those reasons? *It just is*. No one defending these obvious discrepancies can ever piece together a coherent reason why these two modes of killing are substantially, morally different, because what they want to say is, *it has to be.* Because if it's not, then they have to explain why they speak about the deaths of one group in moralizing, humanizing terms and speak about the deaths of another group in anodyne, clinical terms. Faced with the indisputable reality that they are displaying racial and political preferences, they can only handwave.

Aljazeera's weekly program *The Listening Post* produced an excellent 30-minute special on anti-Palestinian bias in Western media in October 2024, which presented this discrepancy[46] (based on my previous analysis published in the *Intercept* from January 2024)[47] to *the New York Times*' ex-Jerusalem Bureau Chief and now Editorial Director of Newsletters at the *New York Times*, Jodi Rudoren. She responded with a similar circular nonanswer. "There was a massacre on Oct 7, there were atrocities committed, it was barbaric," she affirmed to *Al Jazeera*.

> I think those were appropriate words to use. The [Israeli] response was intense, it involved a lot of death, destruction, and displacement. But I'm not sure "massacre," "barbaric" and "atrocity" are appropriate terms, certainly not for the full scale of the war. There are individual attacks within the war where some of those words may be appropriate. So you're talking about two very different things and they deserve different adjectives.

Rudoren never specifies which Israeli "individual attacks within the war" would have merited using these emotive terms, so one is left to wonder, but suffice to say it remains purely theoretical. As a matter, of course, Israel, despite killing upwards of 150,000 Palestinians, managed to do so without once engaging in a "massacre," or a "slaughter," nor engaging in any behavior that could be objectively said to be "barbaric" or "savage"—which is, to put it mildly, quite a coincidence.

OPEN PRO-ISRAEL ADVOCACY FROM MEDIA EXECUTIVES

One cannot discuss US media bias against Palestinians without mentioning the open ideological Zionist activism of the executives of their corporate parents. This express support for Israel from media higher-ups, especially in the days after October 7, signaled to their employees the broader line they were to toe. The two most notable examples being Shari Redstone, then-Chair of CBS News' parent, Paramount Global, and David Zaslav, CEO and President of Warner Bros. Discovery, which owns CNN.

Redstone, prior to selling CBS to even more openly pro-Israel David Ellison in August 2025,[48] broke a decades-long taboo on direct corporate interference in news coverage by intervening in CBS News' Gaza coverage on several occasions to pressure the news division to go softer on Israel. Her first reported intervention came in April 2024, when, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, "Redstone told some CBS officials that she wasn't pleased with a *Face the Nation* broadcast in which the show was critical of Israel after seven aid workers were killed during a strike on Gaza." The CBS head then "sent CBS executives clips from other outlets, as examples of what she felt was balanced coverage," the *Wall Street Journal* reported.[49]

In October 2024, Redstone intervened to chide CBS News producers who had disciplined CBS Mornings anchor Tony Dokoupil for belittling Ta-Nehisi Coates on-air and likening him to an "extremist" for criticizing Israel.[50] Then in Spring 2025, according to reports in the *Wall Street Journal*[51] and *New York Times*,[52] Redstone began directly meddling in *60 Minutes* coverage, specifically over two segments, one from January 12, 2025, and another from April 5, 2025, that Redstone deemed insufficiently pro-Israel. As the *New York Times* reported in August 2025:

> Ms. Redstone said she found most of Mr. Trump's claims about CBS News to be hyperbolic. But she also had her own concerns about how the news division handled criticism of Israel. A week before her board presentation, she had complained to Mr. Cheeks, who oversaw all of CBS, about a *60 Minutes* segment featuring

> former State Department officials who quit their jobs to protest American support for Israel's war in Gaza. The segment touched on the Hamas attack on Israel but focused on alleged Israeli atrocities enabled by weapons supplied by the United States … Maybe, she thought, Mr. Trump's criticism of the news division, and his lawsuit, could be helpful. "We needed more balance," Ms. Redstone said in an interview, referring to that segment and others over the years. "Part of me thought, maybe Trump could accomplish what I never got done."

This meddling led to the high-profile exit of *60 Minutes* executive producer Bill Owens, and subsequent on-air rebuke of Paramount management from CBS News' Scott Pelley. "Paramount began to supervise our content in new ways," Pelley told *60 Minutes* viewers on April 27, 2025. "None of our stories has been blocked, but Bill felt he lost the independence that honest journalism requires."[53] The incident was covered by other media almost exclusively as Redstone sucking up to Trump in anticipation of the Paramount merger with Ellison's Skydance, which was partly true but far from the whole story. Indeed, to the extent that Redstone was flattering Trump, it was in the context of their mutual hostility to journalists acknowledging baseline Palestinian humanity.

A few weeks prior to this incident, Paramount purchased the pro-Israel propaganda film, *The Children of October 7,* which premiered on April 23, 2025, on Paramount+, subsequently ran several times on MTV, and received puff pieces in other CBS News properties. Upon purchasing the film, Redstone said in a personal statement, "This documentary is a clear example in highlighting the terror that occurred on October 7 and the aftermath for thousands of children who will forever suffer from the impact of that day." Despite the fact that, at this point, at least 17,000 Palestinian children had been killed by Israel, compared to the 40 children killed on October 7, Redstone felt it was urgent to exclusively center and memorialize the latter.[54]

After her sale of Paramount to Skydance, Redstone made clear that the impetus for her doing so was that she wanted to be overt in

support for Israel, telling one interviewer in September 2025 that post-October 7, 2023, she had "a new desire to really be supportive of Israel in every way I can." Immediately after the sale, Redstone became a major investor and chairwoman of Sipur, an Israeli TV and film production company, where she hoped to "present the successes of Israel" and produce media that promotes "positive stories of Israel."[55]

Another public pro-Israel voice was David Zaslav, CEO and President of Warner Bros Discovery, which owns CNN. While there are no reports of Zaslav directly intervening in CNN News content, his open support for Israel both before and after October 7 almost certainly set the tone for Warner Bros. Discovery and its properties. As Philip Weiss reported in *Mondoweiss* in February 2024,[56] Zaslav, who had previously praised right-wing Zionist militias, immediately spoke about the attack and subsequent "war" in moralizing, one-sided terms. Calling the attack an "unthinkable evil," he would go on to say in a memo to all Warner Bros. Discovery staff: "The terrorist attacks by Hamas on innocent men, women, children and babies have been unimaginable, abhorrent and inexcusable. Many have lost their lives and others have been taken hostage and remain unaccounted for."

Zaslav and Redstone were not alone. In the days after October 7, other major companies such as Comcast (NBC, MSNBC) and Disney (ABC) helped fuel the rally-around-the-flag sentiment by promising monetary pledges largely to Israeli organizations and releasing statements that the attack was a 9/11-type event where the only appropriate response was unquestioned solidarity with Israel. The general narrative was that October 7 went beyond ideology or politics, but was a clash of civilizations, with good and evil on opposing sides. The only sensible response, therefore, was to back Israel in its nominal war on this "unthinkable evil." While not as explicitly pro-Israel as Zaslav and Redstone, it was clear where Disney, owner of ABC News, stood. "We must all do what we can to support the innocent people experiencing so much pain, violence, and uncertainty—particularly children," said Disney CEO Robert A. Iger after pledging $1 million to Magen David Adom, an aid

group in Israel.[57] "We condemn these attacks, the hate that motivated them, and all acts of terrorism, and we will continue working to find more ways to provide support in the region, and to honor the victims, their families, and all those affected by this war."

From the beginning, media parent corporation CEOs openly threw their weight behind Israel in its so-called "war on Hamas," exclusively centered on Israeli victims, and indexed Hamas as a nihilistic terrorist group with whom political settlements could not, by implication, ever be had. While they would sometimes make opaque reference to "victims in the region," neither the words "Palestine" nor "Palestinians" featured in any of the corporate statements, despite the fact that when the pledges and public statements were made a week or more after October 7, far more Palestinians had been killed than Israelis. These explicitly pro-Israel statements, which only moralized over Israeli suffering while ignoring Palestinians altogether, invariably exerted pressure on those lower down on the food chain, and no doubt served as a major contributor to the broader anti-Palestinian bias overwhelmingly reflected in my data analysis.

"BARBARIC," "SAVAGE," AND THE URGENT NEED FOR RACIALIZED, EXCEPTIONALIZING TERMS

While all of these emotive terms detailed above carry particular historical baggage, it's worth highlighting the frequent usage of "barbaric" and "savage," which carry uniquely racialized connotations. These terms, in particular, are steeped in colonial history, and their nonstop evocation in US media is no accident. Both terms have been used for centuries to dehumanize indigenous people, often in contrast to "civilization." ("Civilization" was evoked by pundits and reporters on CNN and MSNBC during our survey period 150 times, all in reference to Israeli or American culture and all in contrast to the alleged barbarity of Palestinian militants.) Framing the conflict as "East versus West," "civilization" versus "barbarians," provided an easy, cheap framework for dehumanizing Palestinians and morally compartmentalizing a rising Palestinian death toll that, very early

on in Israel's assault on Gaza, was clear would be unprecedented in scale.

Like similar racialized tabloid terms ("thug," "brute," "super-predator"), the terms "barbaric" and "savage" were ostensibly post-racial enough to get past otherwise liberal Standards Editors, but they carry obvious historical associations. Early Victorian anthropology categorized the states of "human development" from prehistory to modernity, as well as contrasting European civilization with "less developed" colonized countries, using the "barbarian/savage" versus "civilized" framework. Most notably, American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan's popular savage–barbarian–civilization triad built off existing racist taxonomies to create not only pseudoscientific stages of human development but also a hierarchical system for existing peoples[58]—namely, those doing the colonizing and those in urgent need of being colonized.

Either deliberately or subconsciously, Hamas attacks are described almost exclusively as "barbaric" or "savage," while Israel wiping out hundreds of Palestinians in a single bombing, systematically shooting children,[59] raping Palestinian captives,[60] wiping out entire family lines,[61] mass starving people as policy,[62] and creating over 10,000 child amputees,[63] is presented as something more anodyne, more inherently civilized and within the bounds of ostensible rules of war. To be clear, it's not that there is anything *per se* wrong with describing the attacks on October 7 as barbaric or savage; it's that these terms evidently cannot, by definition, apply to anything Israel does, no matter how bloody, indiscriminate, animated by genocidal rhetoric, or calculated and widespread. This double standard is thus meant to draw upon centuries-old prejudices and serves no editorial function other than to dehumanize the whole of Gaza's population. This is a rhetorical framework that went entirely unchallenged by legacy media in the critical first few weeks of the genocide and, in key ways, was promoted by editors, reporters, and TV bookers eager to pander to racist clichés of Asiatic brutes menacing civilized Western society.

3

How US media helped the Biden administration distance itself from the horrors of Gaza

An analysis of press coverage of the first year of Israel's assault on Gaza shows a US media eager to produce narratives that allowed the White House to distance itself from the moral, social, political, and professional consequences of its support for Israel. White House and State Department reporters at major US outlets consistently and uncritically parroted self-serving claims by anonymous government aides and Biden think-tank allies, did not interrogate clear conflicts of interest, and focused too much on alleged personality disputes, unverifiable states of mind, and assumed benevolent motives over material policy.

This distancing of the White House from the carnage in Gaza was achieved through three reporting genres: *Helpless Biden*, *Fuming/Deeply Concerned Biden*, and *Third-Partying*.

- *Helpless Biden* was any report, analysis, or opinion that describes Biden as unable to do anything to stop Israel from committing war crimes or end the war overall. This was typically framed as a "limit" to US power, often accompanied by a picture of Biden looking overwhelmed, sad, or doddering. These are sourced almost entirely by anonymous Biden aides and Biden allies in the think-tank world.[1]

- *Fuming/Deeply Concerned Biden* was any report, analysis, or opinion that painted Biden as secretly upset, outraged, or privately sad or anguished about civilian casualties in Gaza. These

articles are also sourced almost entirely by anonymous Biden aides and Biden allies in the think-tank world.[2]

- *Third-Partying* was a variation of an anti-labor propaganda concept whereby corporations treat unions as somehow separate from workers and worker democracy in order to portray unions as an outside "third party." Just the same, media reports consistently paint the United States as separate from the conflict, despite the United States being the major patron of one side, deploying troops and military hardware, assisting in military operations, providing intel, and protecting Israel at the United Nations. US media consistently framed the United States as a neutral party—even a humanitarian force—always looking (but, mysteriously, always failing) to end the conflict. This was typically done through coverage of largely fictitious "ceasefire talks," whereby US media conflated efforts for a short-term pause for the purpose of hostage exchanges with "ending the war."[3]

Before detailing the three media genres that helped the Biden White House distance itself from the horrors of Gaza, one must establish two premises:

(1) The Biden White House could have ended Israel's bombing, siege, and occupation of Gaza whenever it wished and chose not to.

The evidence that Biden had sufficient leverage to compel Israel to end its military campaign in Gaza was well-documented and widely understood at the time. Seven US-based unions representing 6 million workers (AFA-CWA, APWU, IUPAT, SEIU, UAW, UE, NEA)[4] and over 250 humanitarian organizations (among them Oxfam, Amnesty International, Save the Children, American Friends Service Committee)[5] called for an arms embargo against Israel pursuant to this end. In his 2023 book on Biden, *The Last Politician*, Franklin Foer reported how Biden put an end to Israel's bombing of Gaza in 2021 with a single phone call. After Netanyahu

"struggled to justify his request" for more bombing of Gaza because he "couldn't point to fresh targets that needed striking," Biden said, according to Foer, "Hey, man, we're out of runway here. It's over." And then, Foer wrote, "like that, it was over. By the time the call ended, Netanyahu reluctantly agreed to a ceasefire that the Egyptians would broker."[6]

The *Financial Times* certainly thought so when they wrote in an October 2024 editorial, "US President Joe Biden must end the year-long cycle of death and destruction … Biden has the tools to rein in Netanyahu. He must halt the offensive arms sales to Israel that enable its relentless bombing of Gaza and Lebanon."[7]

But, most compelling of all are the Israeli officials who repeatedly argued that Biden could end their campaign whenever he wanted to. In the early days of the conflict, critics pressed Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant about why Israel agreed to allow in limited humanitarian aid to Gaza. He responded, "The Americans insisted, and we are not in a place where we can refuse them. We rely on them for planes and military equipment. What are we supposed to do? Tell them no?"[8] Retired Israeli Major General Yitzhak Brick said in a November 2023 interview, "All of our missiles, the ammunition, the precision-guided bombs, all the airplanes and bombs, it's all from the US. The minute they turn off the tap, you can't keep fighting. You have no capability … Everyone understands that we can't fight this war without the United States. Period."[9]

And, if any doubt remained, Israeli ambassador Michael Herzog put these doubts to rest after Biden left office, explicitly confirming to Channel 13 in April 2025, "God did the State of Israel a favor that Biden was the president during this period … We fought [in Gaza] for over a year and the administration never came to us and said, 'ceasefire now.' It never did. And that's not to be taken for granted."[10]

(2) Those in the Biden White House had obvious professional, social, political, and moral reasons for wanting to promote the idea that they were not responsible for the daily atrocities occurring in Gaza.

On this premise, from the beginning Israel was credibly accused of a host of war crimes by Human Rights Watch[11] and Amnesty International,[12] had been widely condemned by almost every country on earth, and had been credibly accused of "plausible" genocide by the International Court of Justice[13] and of outright genocide by Aryeh Neier, the co-founder of Human Rights Watch.[14] Domestically, despite support for Israel in the abstract, the "war" had been incredibly unpopular with US voters—namely Democrats who Biden, and later Vice President Kamala Harris, had to turn out in the November 2024 Presidential election. Therefore, White House officials had the incentive to distance themselves from the inevitable, horrific outcomes of Israel's siege, bombing, and occupation of Gaza.[15]

Helpless Biden

Our first genre is *Helpless Biden*, which we define as any reporting, opinion, or analysis that broadly advances the premise that calls for Biden to end Israel's "war in Gaza" are pointless, because even if he wanted to, Biden can't influence Israel enough for it to matter.

Our study analyzed ten prominent examples of the *Helpless Biden* genre:

1. *Washington Post*, May 11, 2023, "White House Frustrated by Israel's Onslaught But Sees Few Options"
2. *New York Time*s, June 11, 2023, "Biden Confronts the Limits of U.S. Leverage in Two Conflicts"
3. *Politico*, July 11, 2023, "Why the U.S. isn't stopping this war, and other Middle East Realities"
4. *Washington Post*, March 18, 2024, "How Biden Became Embroiled in a Gaza Conflict With No End In Sight"
5. *Washington Post*, April 6, 2024, "Six Months Into Gaza War, Biden Confronts the Limits of U.S. Leverage"
6. *New York Times*, September 29, 2024, "Why the World's Biggest Powers Can't Stop a Middle East War"
7. *Washington Post*, September 30, 2024, "As Israel Escalates in Lebanon, U.S. Influence is Limited"

8. *Politico*, October 2, 2024, "Biden Confronts the Limits of His Influence Over Israel"
9. *Washington Pos*t, October 3, 2024, "How Joe Biden Lost His Grip On Israel's War For 'Total Victory' in Gaza"
10. *New York Times*, October 7, 2024, "A Year Later, Biden Faces the Limits of U.S. Influence in the Mideast"

Our source analysis shows that 90.3 percent of the sources for these articles are Israeli officials, Biden aides (typically anonymous), or Biden allies in the think-tank world. The three most common sources cited were Biden "officials" (51), "Israeli officials" (10), or "aides" (6).

In none of these pieces was the idea that Biden was powerless ever meaningfully questioned. To the extent it was broached at all, it was typically in a "to be sure" paragraph quoting "critics" or "Arab and Muslim Americans," then handwaved away or dismissed via what is, in effect, circular reasoning: As in, Biden can't end Israel's military campaign, because he doesn't want to.

CAN'T VERSUS WON'T

One example of this dishonest framing was in *New York Times* opinion columnist and Paris bureau chief Roger Cohen's September 29, 2024, analysis, "Why the World's Biggest Powers Can't Stop a Middle East War." In the piece, Cohen writes,

> The United States does have enduring leverage over Israel, notably in the form of military aid that involved a $15 billion package signed this year by President Biden. But an ironclad alliance with Israel built around strategic and domestic political considerations, as well as the shared values of two democracies, means Washington will almost certainly never threaten to cut—let alone cut off—the flow of arms.[16]

This was Cohen saying Biden wouldn't cut off Israel, because he agreed with what Israel was doing. Why then, one is compelled to

ask, does the headline say Biden "Can't Stop a Middle East War" when Cohen, himself, just made clear it's not a matter of can't but won't.

In the *Washington Post*'s "White House Frustrated By Israel's Onslaught But Sees Few Options," the reporter, Yasmeen Abutaleb, acknowledges that the limits on Biden were self-imposed, but reduces this decision to not cut off arms *as a choice he was making* to, instead, a niche condemnation from "critics of the Biden administration, including many Arab and Muslim Americans." Abutaleb writes,

> administration officials and advisers say the levers the United States theoretically has over Israel, such as conditioning military aid on making the military campaign more targeted, are nonstarters, partly because they would be so politically unpopular in any administration and partly because, aides say, Biden himself has a personal attachment to Israel.[17]

Again, one is compelled to ask, why is the headline that the White House "Sees Few Options," rather than "Biden Chooses Not to Rein in Israel?" The "few options" were not imposed on the White House by some outside force; it was a choice—according to the *Post* itself—that the Biden administration made. But this fact was downplayed or obscured.

The most popular promoter of this ubiquitous talking point was Biden ally Aaron David Miller,[18] a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, whose role during the Biden tenure was to pop into countless *Helpless Biden* articles to reassure the reader that Biden was, in fact, unable to really stop Israel even if he wanted to. Miller, who once referred to himself as "Israel's lawyer,"[19] explained, as the *Washington Post* paraphrased it on April 6, 2024, "The influence of any outside party—even one that has theoretically on paper an enormous amount of influence on Israel—is limited."[20] The *Post* caps off the piece with Miller saying he "sees little way out for the administration." Six months later, Miller would tell the *New York Times*' Michael D. Shear, "The gap between

what Biden hoped to achieve and what ultimately he was forced to encounter is as wide as the Grand Canyon," without any explanation as to why or how this makes sense.[21]

In his own long-form apologia explaining the intractable reality of *Helpless Biden* in *Foreign Policy* magazine, Miller conceded that Biden did have significant influence, writing, "It's not that the Biden administration lacks leverage on Israel. The president has many tools in his arsenal, such as conditioning or restricting US military assistance to Israel; introducing or supporting a United Nations Security Council resolution that is critical of its policies in Gaza." But Miller went on to insist Biden couldn't use it, because "the president's deep emotional commitment to the idea, security, and people of Israel honed over decades; the United States' domestic political landscape, where the Republican Party has emerged as the 'Israel-can-do-no-wrong' party, and a policy fixated on a cease-fire that required the agreement of both Israel and Hamas."[22]

But Hamas agreed to the basic outline of the US ceasefire offer at the beginning of the conflict. The holdout has always been Israel, which will not—according to its own officials—stop until "total victory," regardless of the fate of the Israeli hostages.[23] So the last point was a *Non Sequitur*, bordering on falsehood. And the first two arguments—that Biden loved Israel and Republicans could potentially criticize Biden for forcing Israel to end its campaign—are, again, not reasons why he *couldn't* restrain Israel; they're reasons why he *wouldn't*.

Time and again, the conflation of "can't" and "won't" informed Biden White House-curated narratives. It's unclear why editors continued to allow anonymous aides and Biden allies to launder their responsibility with self-serving claims of powerlessness. Reporters and opinion columnists ignored these obvious conflicts of interest from those who had every reason to absolve themselves and their administration of moral and social responsibility for war crimes in Gaza, providing officials with the space to describe a Helpless Biden who couldn't change things even if he wanted to.

American readers of elite media were constantly told from November 2023 to January 2025 that Biden was supporting every-

thing Israel did, but didn't really want to for some ill-defined and mysterious reason. In one March 2024 *Washington Post* article, "based on interviews with 20 administration officials and outside advisers," Abutaleb and John Hudson explained to readers, "how Biden, more than five months after the Oct. 7 attacks, has found himself deeply entangled in a war he does not want."[24]

If Biden didn't "want" the "war," then *why did he continue to back it without condition*? What does it mean for the most powerful person on earth to "not want" something but to support it for over five months? That Biden advisers would run to the press and detail how much Biden—and by extension themselves—secretly didn't want a deeply unpopular assault on Gaza that, at that point, had killed at least 13,000 children, is nonsensical and self-serving. Yet it's a conceit that was widely taken at face value by US media because, among other reasons, it morally absolved those in their social and professional circles.

Fuming/Deeply Concerned Biden

A key companion to *Helpless Biden* was the *Fuming/Deeply Concerned Biden*. This was any report, analysis, or opinion that painted Biden as secretly upset, outraged, having stern words for Netanyahu, or privately sad or anguished about civilian casualties.

1. NBC News, November 15, 2023, "The Gap Between the Biden Administration and the Netanyahu Government Over Gaza's Future is Widening"
2. CNN, December 14, 2023, "Unprecedented Tensions Between White House and Netanyahu as Biden Feels Political Price For Standing With Israel"
3. *Axios*, January 14, 2024, "Biden 'Running Out' of Patience With Bibi as Gaza War Hits 100 Days"
4. *Washington Post*, February 11, 2024, "Biden Moving Closer Than Ever to a Breach With Netanyahu Over War in Gaza"
5. CNN, March 8, 2024, "How a Brief Exchange in a Call Explains the Strained Biden-Netanyahu Relationship"

6. Associated Press, March 10, 2024, "Biden Cajoles Netanyahu With Tough Talk, Humanitarian Concerns But Israeli PM Remains Dug In"
7. *Politico*, March 22, 2024, "From 'I Love You' to 'Asshole': How Joe Gave Up on Bibi: After Decades of Building a 'Close, Personal' Friendship With Benjamin Netanyahu, Joe Biden Has Had It With the Israeli Prime Minister. Now He's Hitting Him Hard—And It May Be Working"
8. *New York Times*, May 11, 2024, "The Long, Tortured Road to Biden's Clash With Netanyahu Over Gaza War"
9. *Axios*, June 18, 2024, "White House Cancels Meeting, Scolds Netanyahu In Protest Over Video"
10. *New York Times*, August 3, 2024, "Killing of Hamas Leader Fuels More Tension Between Biden and Netanyahu"

A source analysis showed that nearly 94 percent of the sources of these articles are Israeli officials or ex-officials, Biden aides (typically anonymous), or Biden allies in the think-tank world. The most common sources for these articles are "[White House/US] officials" (49), "Israeli officials" (12), and President Biden himself (11).

Despite the fact that there were dozens of these articles, ostensibly detailing how angry, disappointed, or "concerned for civilians" Biden was behind closed doors, no mainstream reporter found it suspicious that Biden refused to use any of his available leverage to stop the thing he was allegedly so upset about. This is what made this genre non-journalistic: Nothing was actually happening. There was no policy change, no material shift in the facts on the ground, no reporting on anything that would affect Palestinians in Gaza. These articles were conspicuous displays of supposed consternation and handwringing, not a reporting of events with consequences for real people. This genre of article was defined entirely by self-serving leaks, supposed personality disputes, and what is, in effect, mind-reading by reporters.

Was Biden upset? Was he "angry" with Netanyahu? The reporters had no way of knowing beyond hearsay and phone calls that Biden knew were being recorded and reported. But more importantly,

the story—such as it was—*never went anywhere*. In Theater 101, students learn that the difference between a plot and a sketch is that a plot evolves, it has beat changes, characters grow, and the story propels forward. Sketches, by contrast, are the same gag three or four times to draw out the absurdity of the situation, then everyone gets out in under five minutes. Fuming/Deeply Concerned Biden was fundamentally a sketch: It never escalated, no one in Israel was ever sanctioned over Gaza, weapons were never withheld (despite claims to the contrary), *nothing ever changed.*[25] Biden was just always vaguely mad and/or sad. But, unlike a sketch where the bit is done three or four times, we saw the same skit performed dozens of times for months on end.

The most consistent stenographer of *Fuming/Deeply Concerned Biden* was *Axios*' Barak Ravid, who wrote 26 different versions during our survey period from October 2023 to October 2024, quoting either US officials directly or a string of anonymous "US officials"—often as alleged scoops—affirming that Biden and White House officials were some variation of "breaking with Netanyahu," "increasingly frustrated,"[26] "running out" of patience,[27] or "deeply concerned"[28] about civilian casualties. Ravid, himself a former member of Unit 8200, Israel's "secretive cyber warfare unit,"[29] was awarded for his suite of *Fuming/Deeply Concerned* reporting with the White House Correspondents' Association's award for journalistic excellence in April 2024, during which he glowingly posed for pictures with President Biden.

To make these non-stories seem newsier, *Fuming/Deeply Concerned Biden* reports often peppered direct or implicit claims of a just-around-the-corner "break" between Biden and Netanyahu.[30] "Biden moving closer than ever to a breach with Netanyahu," the *Washington Post* pronounced in February 2024.[31] "After decades of building a 'close, personal' friendship with Benjamin Netanyahu, Joe Biden has had it with the Israeli prime minister," *Politico*'s Michael Hirsh told us in March 2024.[32] The *New York Times*' Peter Baker informed his readers that Biden "has finally had it with an Israeli leadership that he believes is not listening to him."[33]

Alas, no break ever materialized. Baker even indicated Biden's new supposedly angry posture was delivering results: "To some degree, the Israelis have responded," Baker told readers of the *New York Times* on May 11, 2024, "despite more than three months of vowing to invade Rafah, they have yet to actually do so beyond limited strikes."

Three days after Baker's report, on May 14, the IDF entered the center of Rafah, quickly turning the city that once held 275,000 residents into a "ghost town," as NBC News put it.[34] And, as of July 2025, data from one Hebrew University study showed that 89 percent of buildings in Rafah had been completely or partially destroyed.[35] Even the most pro-Biden analysts agree that Netanyahu steamrolled through Biden's supposed Rafah "red line."[36]

In retrospect, we should ask: What was the purpose of Baker's *Fuming/Deeply Concerned Biden* report just days before Israel invaded Rafah? Was it to accurately reflect a meaningful change in policy brought about by genuine US pressure, or was it to help distance the White House from the inevitable reports and images of death and destruction that were about to come out?[37]

Third-Partying

Third-Partying was a PR tactic used by the White House. But it also should be understood as a standard reporting practice, driven by media chauvinism that simply takes for granted, as a matter of course, that US motives are peace-seeking in nature—despite the fact that the United States was an active participant in the conflict.

Let's look at eight prominent examples from just the *New York Times* from each month beginning in March 2024—the first month the Biden White House pivoted from banning the word "ceasefire" to embracing it and redefining it to mean something else.

- March 5, 2024: "Biden Expresses Hope on Cease-Fire Talks, but Hamas Appears to Reject Latest Offer"
- April 29, 2024: "Biden Team Sees Narrow Window for Deal on Cease-Fire and Hostages in Gaza"

- May 1, 2024: "Blinken Turns Up Pressure on Hamas to Accept Gaza Cease-Fire Deal"
- June 5, 2024: "Biden's Push to End the War in Gaza"
- July 4, 2024: "U.S. and Israel Voice New Optimism About Cease-Fire as Gaza Talks Resume"
- August 20, 2024: "U.S. Push for Gaza Cease-Fire Falls Short on Key Points, Officials Say"
- September 23, 2024: "Biden Works Against the Clock as Violence Escalates in the Middle East"
- October 18, 2024: "Hamas Says Its Demands Are Unchanged as Biden Pushes for Gaza Cease-Fire"

There were thousands of examples in US media of editors taking for granted that the United States was earnestly seeking a "peace deal," "truce," or "ceasefire," but simply couldn't bring Israel and Hamas to agree to terms. This, despite the fact that—as we have established—the Biden White House could have *simply imposed a ceasefire on Israel whenever it chose to do so, but never did so.*

THE UNQUESTIONED PREMISE OF GOOD-FAITH CEASEFIRE TALKS

To understand the nuances of how this *Third-Partying* PR effort had been so successful, it's important to explain how much of the heavy lifting was done through the shifting, extremely malleable definition of "ceasefire," and US media's unwillingness to question what the term meant or how the White House's usage differed so significantly from its usage with humanitarian, aid, and human rights groups.

The Biden White House routinely made mutually exclusive statements about their desire to "end the war," while saying Hamas could "have no role in post-war Gaza." Yet, no mainstream reporter, editor, or opinion writer ever bothered to reconcile this contradiction. This calculated vagueness was central to why Israel was permitted to continue bombing and killing at will during the whole of Biden's term. How could US officials simultaneously push for an "imme-

diate, lasting ceasefire" while, at the same time, saying the other warring party must be completely defeated before they can support a lasting ceasefire?

This wasn't a call for a ceasefire—it was a call for, in Netanyahu's phrasing, "total victory." The pairing of these two mutually exclusive phrases could only mean one thing: In common usage from the White House and its friendly media, "pushing for a ceasefire" meant "continuing to bomb and besiege Gaza while reiterating terms of surrender."

One linguistic trick that permitted this contradiction to go unchallenged was the sleight-of-hand in what the White House meant by ceasefire. In some contexts, it meant the term as it has been used by the Israelis, namely by Netanyahu: a temporary pause in fighting to facilitate hostage exchanges, followed by a continuation of the military campaign whose goal, ostensibly, was to "eliminate Hamas." But this was explicitly not an effort to "end the war" as Netanyahu made clear repeatedly throughout the conflict.

The White House's demand to "end the war," increasingly popular beginning in Spring 2024 and lasting until the Trump-imposed temporary pause in January 2025, was just a reiteration of surrender terms. The State Department banned its staff from even using the word "ceasefire"[38] for the first few months of the conflict. But in late February 2024, on the eve of a Michigan primary where an increasingly popular Uncommitted National Movement was embarrassing then-candidate Biden, the White House, as I noted in the *Nation* at the time,[39] pivoted to embracing the term. The Biden administration understood that its pro-genocide position was growing increasingly untenable, so it changed its definition to mean: (1) the above hostage negotiations, but with a firm commitment to continue the "war" once Israeli captives were freed, and (2) a reiteration of surrender demands, sometimes using both definitions simultaneously.

The concepts of "ceasefire" and "push to the end the war" became, like the broader "Middle East peace process," an ill-defined, open-ended process for processes' sake that US officials could point to in order to frame themselves not as participants in a brutal, largely

one-sided siege and bombing campaign, but as a third party desperately trying—but perpetually failing—to achieve "peace."

But this only makes sense if one overlooks the contradiction at the heart of the White House's talking points. Take one typical example: In a press conference on October 17, 2024, Vice President Kamala Harris told reporters these two phrases just seconds apart:

- "[The killing of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar] gives us an opportunity to finally end the war."
- "It is time for the day after to begin without Hamas in power."[40]

How can the Israelis "end the war" and "begin without Hamas in power"? What the White House was calling for here was not a ceasefire but a surrender. Historically, "ceasefire" means both parties stop firing, not that one party was crushed militarily or capitulated.

Did the *New York Times*, which reported on the press conference in detail, reconcile this contradiction? Did reporters Katie Rogers and Reid J. Epstein ask how Harris can seek to "end the war" while requiring the total defeat of Hamas as a condition of ending the war? Did they inquire about what these statements meant when, according to Israeli analysts at the time and in the months prior, Hamas was years away from being "defeated"?[41] Did any of them ask why Harris wasn't pushing President Biden to use leverage to compel Israel to agree to an actual ceasefire?

Without exception, mainstream US media, for the better part of a year, permitted this discussion of nonsensical "ceasefire talks" back and forth to continue, even as we never saw any meaningful progress. (The rare time the glaring contradiction was noted, it was framed as a good thing—"constructive ambiguity," as *Axios*' Ravid put it—a way to create space for peace or some such handwaving rhetoric.)[42] Important people showed up "in the Middle East" in suits, talked about "making progress," and "sought an end to the war," and reporters took their efforts at face value as a good-faith "peace effort." To the extent that there were any real negotiations between Israel and Hamas, they had been entirely confined to discussions about hostage exchanges, which, both the US and Israel

made clear, would *explicitly not end the war* but provide a brief pause like the one in November 2023.

Thus, American media consumers were fed a constant stream of *Third-Partying*, which consistently positioned the Biden administration as a disinterested humanitarian force perpetually seeking peace, but thwarted by stubborn Israelis and Palestinians. When, in reality, the US was aiding the siege and bombing of Gaza, and US officials were, over and over again, just reiterating Israel's demand for Hamas' total surrender.

Take one typical example: a *Financial Times* headline from October 29, 2024, that read, "Gaza aid falls to lowest level since start of war despite US warning to Israel."[43] But aid wasn't falling "despite" the US; it was falling *because the US was backing the Israeli military's strategy of starvation as a tool of war*.[44] The "warning" was for public consumption; it was not a real mode of pressure, and we know this because Israel ignored these "warnings" over and over again for months without consequence. The Biden administration was not a powerless NGO standing on the sidelines with a clipboard. They were an active participant in the conflict—providing arms, military support, troops and diplomatic support for the starvation campaign in question. But Americans, namely liberal Americans consuming mainstream US news from February 2024 to the end of Biden's tenure, would hardly know this. Reading coverage of the "ceasefire talks" and reports of a perpetually frustrated, angry and thwarted Biden, they would have the distinct impression the White House was a bumbling, uninvolved humanitarian third party overwhelmed by forces outside of their control.

4

Covering war crimes like earthquakes

In the hours after the October 7 attacks, it was clear Israel's "military response" would be indiscriminate, and predicated—like previous Gaza bombing campaigns—on the so-called Dahiyeh Doctrine, an Israeli military doctrine premised on bombing civilians and civilian infrastructure in order to extract capitulation from an opposing military actor.[1] US media could not reasonably ignore the horrors quickly emerging from Gaza, but they could do the next best thing: report on them in abstract, clinical tones while removing or obscuring responsibility for them. Despite their best efforts to sterilize the carnage in Gaza by painting the conflict as a vaguely symmetrical "war on Hamas" or "the Israel–Hamas" war (framings designed to conjure in one's mind images of two armies lined up like the Battle of Waterloo), the fact of mass bombing, disease and displacement, and the reality that 99 percent of the victims were Palestinians, had to be reported, even if sparingly, for US media to maintain basic credibility.

To do so without meaningfully subverting US–Israeli national security consensus, outlets like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, CNN, and others largely reported on war crimes without centering a clear perpetrator, trafficking in a variation of what social critic and documentarian Adam Curtis refers to as "Oh Dearism," a mode of liberal mournful witness where the observer is outraged and sickened but is rarely provided a clear responsible party, much less any political call to action. Put another way: one could report on the fact of severed limbs, entire families wiped out, refugee camps bombed-out, shredded toddlers—and even occasionally be disgusted and angered—but blame for the unspeakable violence had to

be left ambiguous enough to allow space for the Washington consensus to give the impression that the horrors, as lamentable as they may be, were, ultimately the fault of Hamas for "refusing to surrender or return the hostages." This mode of reporting on the horrors coming out of Gaza, even somewhat empathetically, did not run afoul of the liberal Zionist framework of Feeling Sad about Gaza but ultimately blaming the carnage on the Palestinian militants for their refusal to capitulate. Thus, newsrooms could engage in this type of reporting—ostensibly critical of Israel to the casual observer—without challenging their pro-Israel editors or corporate executives, pro-Israel pressure groups, or the broader US national security state dogma, because it was ultimately a passive, value-neutral genre of reportage.

This genre, which we call the *Natural Disaster-izing of Israeli War Crimes*, thus reported on mass death as one would an earthquake or tornado—an act of god with a vague or uncertain human agent or political antecedent. It falls neatly between (3) *It's Happening and It's Bad But Hamas Is Responsible/"Human Shields" Discourse* and (4) *Kinder, Gentler Genocide/"Reduce Civilian Deaths" Discourse* in our Moats of Rationalization chart we discussed in the introduction. It was, to put it in psychological terms, a coping mechanism. The videos of gruesome mass murder emanating from Gaza on social media were too conspicuous to ignore, so our media filled the gap by reporting on these horrors in the strict sense but, unlike war crimes committed by Russia, for example, stripping them of politics—obscuring or entirely ignoring Israeli and US responsibility, or, in the more obscene cases, placing the blame on Palestinians for effectively bringing it on themselves.

This *Natural Disaster-izing of Israeli War Crimes* coverage fell into two further sub-genres: (1) *Breaking News* ("Explosion Gazans Say Was Airstrike Leaves Many Casualties in Dense Neighborhood")[2] that buries or outright omits the guilty party in the framing and (2) the *Very Serious Investigative Piece*, typically glossy Pulitzer-bait that's well-reported in the strict sense of being well-produced and containing lots of words, but—when it comes to Gaza—very light on outlining moral responsibility or (explicit or implicit) calls to

action. Typically, this sub-genre documents deaths and maimings in Gaza, often with grim picture essays, but muddies moral culpability by ignoring or burying Israel's criminal intent or folding the horrors neatly into an "Israel–Hamas war" of both sides' framing.

SUB-GENRE (1): *BREAKING NEWS*

A brief review of the *New York Times*' front-page coverage documenting Israeli war crimes and/or mass death shows human agency is almost always removed from their headlines. It's a difficult genre to pin down, given how many rolling articles there are, but focusing on front-page headlines gives a non-arbitrary sampling. To highlight the double standard, let us compare how the *New York Times* centered agency in Russia's attack on Ukraine in Spring 2022 versus Israel's invasion, bombing and siege of Gaza in fall 2023, using relevant front-page headlines for the first 30 days after Russia's invasion.

Russia–Ukraine: February 24, 2022–March 24, 2022:

- **RUSSIA ATTACKS** AS PUTIN WARNS WORLD (February 24, 2022)
- As War Grinds Into 5th Day, **Kremlin Starts Hitting Harder** (March 1, 2022)
- **RUSSIA BATTERS KEY CITIES** IN WIDER ATTACK (March 2, 2022)
- **RUSSIANS** CAPTURE CRUCIAL BLACK SEA PORT AS **BOMBING OF CIVILIAN TARGETS ESCALATES** (March 3, 2022)
- **Russia Strikes Maternity Center**; Many Trapped in Besieged Cities (March 10, 2022)
- CARNAGE WIDENS AS CEASE-FIRE TALKS FALTER: Before and After the **Russians Attacked** (March 11, 2022)
- **RUSSIA WIDENS ATTACKS** ON UKRAINIAN CITIES (March 12, 2022)

- "**MOSCOW HITS** MILITARY BASE NEAR POLAND" (March 14, 2022)
- "Zelensky Presses Congress to Help as **Russia Pounds Cities**" (March 17, 2022)
- "Taking Heavy Losses on Battlefield, **Russians Aim Missiles at Cities**" (March 18, 2022)
- "**Russia Hits** Western Ukraine" (March 19, 2022)
- "**Russia Bombards** Strategic Port from Land, Air and Sea" (March 21, 2022)
- "**Russian Shells Blanket** Ukrainian Capital and Port City" (March 22, 2022)
- "Ukraine Mounts Counterattacks as **Russia Pounds Cities**" (March 23, 2022)

Note how Russia's agency is frequently centered and made clear to the reader. Now let us compare how the *New York Times* framed Israel's bombardment, invasion and shelling of Gaza for the first month of its campaign. To maximize fairness, we will wait until the civilian death count far surpasses the October 7 attack and begin the clock on October 14, a week into the "war." Note how agency is either always missing or framed in purely defensive terms:

Israel–Gaza: October 14, 2023–November 14, 2023 (exhaustive list of headlines related to Gaza):

- "Israel Readies an Invasion to Capture Gaza City" (October 15, 2023)
- "**Hospitals Face Another Layer of Impossible**" (October 16, 2023)
- "BIDEN SETS ISRAEL TRIP IN SHOW OF U.S. BOND; But Risks Linking U.S. With **Civilian Strikes** [ed note: by whom?] Amid a Worsening Crisis in Gaza" (October 17, 2023)
- "**BLAST KILLS** HUNDREDS AT GAZA HOSPITAL" (October 18, 2023)
- "**An Explosion**, Then 'Too Many Bodies' to Count" (October 19, 2023)

- "Deal Is Reached on Aid Through Egypt to Gaza, As **Desperation Mounts**" (October 20, 2023)
- "Despite Promises, **Aid For Gaza Is Still Stuck** At Border With Egypt" (October 21, 2023)
- "**VIOLENCE SPREADS** AWAY FROM GAZA, RISKING WIDE WAR" (October 23, 2023)
- "**STRIKES ON GAZA** INTENSIFY AS AID ENTERS IN TRICKLE" (October 24, 2023)
- "**GAZA DEATHS RISE** AS ANGER FLARES IN U.N. SPEECHES" (October 25, 2023)
- "As **Bombs Fall,** History Hangs Over Gaza Family" (October 26, 2023)
- "**Taps Run Dry** and **Food Grows Scarce** in Gaza" (October 27, 2023)
- "'**GROUND ACTIVITY' INCREASES IN GAZA** AS **AIRSTRIKES RISE**" (October 28, 2023)
- "**Encircling Gaza City** from the North, East and South" (October 31, 2023)
- "**Fatal Strike in Dense Area** as Israelis Aim at Hamas" (November 1, 2023)
- "HUNDREDS ESCAPE TREMULOUS GAZA AT EGYPT BORDER" (November 2, 2023)
- "**Troops Encircle Gaza City** As Israel Backlash Grows | Netanyahu Defends Airstrikes That a U.N. Agency Says May Be a War Crime" (November 3, 2023)
- "Vast Destruction in Less Than a Month of War [ed note: by whom?]" (November 3, 2023)
- "U.S. Is Urging Israel to Limit Gaza Fatalities" (November 5, 2023)
- "ISRAEL'S MILITARY HAS DIVIDED GAZA INTO TWO REGIONS" (November 7, 2023)
- "ISRAELIS INVOKING TOLL OF U.S. WARS AS MORAL SHIELD: **CIVILIAN DEATH DEBATE** | Arguing That Innocents Inevitably Suffer in Any Combat" (November 8, 2023)
- "**As Gaza War Rages**, Business Leaders, Often Vocal, Tread Lightly" (November 9, 2023)

- "Hamas's Goal for Oct. 7: A Permanent State of War" (November 9, 2023)
- "ISRAEL AND HAMAS CLASH OVER A **CITY REDUCED TO RUINS**" (November 10, 2023)
- "GAZA'S HOSPITALS BEAR THE BRUNT AS BATTLES RAGE | LARGEST COMPLEX HIT | **Israel Is "Closing In" on a Haven It Says Hamas Uses as a Hideout**" (November 11, 2023)
- "**Plight of Gaza's Main Hospital Worsens** as Israeli Forces Close In" (November 12, 2023)
- "Claim of **Hamas Tunnels Under Hospital** Faces Test | Israel Presses In on a Facility That It Says **Sits Atop a Vast Command Complex**" (November 13, 2023)
- "**HOSPITAL SHAKES IN GAZA AS FIGHTS RAGE AT DOORSTEP**" (November 14, 2023)[3]

The differences are overwhelming and self-evident. When Israel is attacking Palestinians, "Airstrikes rise," "deaths rise," "violence spreads," "aid is stuck," "desperation mounts," hospitals "face" a "layer of impossible," a mysterious "blast" kills Palestinians, the "plight of Gaza's Main Hospital Worsens." When Russia is the culprit, "Russia widens attack," "Russian shells blanket," "Russia strikes maternity center," "Russia batters key cities," "Moscow hits military bases." In Ukraine, Russia deliberately commits manifestly violent acts; it has a design and purpose. In Gaza, violent acts have no apparent author, seem to come out of nowhere, are bracketed by unsubstantiated, exculpatory claims from the IDF, and if attribution is noted, it's almost always defensive in nature.

One particularly egregious example, "**HOSPITAL SHAKES IN GAZA AS FIGHTS RAGE AT DOORSTEP**," was flat out false, as we will lay out in Chapter 5. There was no "fight raging" near Al-Shifa Hospital. According to Israeli officials, days after this headline was published, Israeli troops simply walked into Al-Shifa Hospital without incident because it wasn't, as the IDF alleged and the *New York Times* parroted, a "Hamas command center." It was just a hospital.[4]

If one expands the survey of the *New York Times*' front-page headlines and sub-headlines to 60 days, the disparity is even more apparent. In their coverage of Israel's bombing of Gaza from October 15, 2023 to December 15, 2023, the *New York Times* only mentions Israeli agency twice in a headline/sub-headline—once on November 26, 2023 ("Big Bombs in Urban Areas Raise Civilian Toll in Gaza | Israel Has Killed More Women and Children Than Have Been Killed in Ukraine")[5] and again on December 3, 2023 (Israel Launches "Intense" Strikes In South Gaza").[6] By contrast, for the first 60 days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Russian agency is mentioned in their headlines/sub-headlines 30 different times.

This is not just a front-page editorial double standard. Russian agency is routinely centered by the *New York Times*, and Israeli agency is obscured. "**Russian Missiles Hit** Ukraine's Energy System, Again." "The **Russians Destroyed Their Villages**. Now They Rebuild." "**Russian Attack** Leaves Over a Million in Ukraine Without Electricity." "**Russian Attacks** Crush Factories and Way of Life in Ukrainian Villages." "**Russia Targets** Ukraine With Large-Scale Missile Attack." Meanwhile**,** in Gaza, "**Explosion Gazans Say** Was Airstrike Leaves Many Casualties in Dense Neighborhood." "**Hundreds Reported Killed in Blast** at a Gaza Hospital." "**Carnage at Gaza School** Compound Adds to Mounting Death Toll at U.N. Buildings." "**Strike on Area** Where Displaced Gazans Were Camped Kills Up to 25." "**More Than 20 Killed** Near Aid Distribution Site in Gaza, Health Officials Say." "**American Woman Shot and Killed** at West Bank Protest." "**Palestinian Officials Say 5 Journalists Are Killed** in Gaza Strike." "**How a Single Family Was Shot Dead** on a Street in Gaza." "They Were Told They Were in a Safe Area**. Then Came the Missiles**." "**Explosions Cripple Ship** Carrying Aid to Gaza in the Mediterranean Sea."

SUB-GENRE (2): *VERY SERIOUS INVESTIGATIVE PIECES*

I did a comparative analysis of the in-depth investigative pieces published by the *New York Times* during the first year. We chose these specific articles because they represent the outlet's most common

model of conducting investigations, based on an extensive review of their coverage. These *Very Serious Investigative Pieces* for the *New York Times* show that when violence is carried out by Palestinians or Russians, the agency is centered. Yet when violence is carried out by Israelis, the agency is either buried or never mentioned at all—in a clear editorial double standard:

Note that in the eight major Very Serious Investigative Pieces for the *New York Times* detailing Israeli war crimes and their impact on Palestinians, Israel is not mentioned in any of the headlines or sub-headlines. And in two prominent articles, "Pregnant in Gaza With Nowhere to Go" from June 2024,[7] and "With Schools in Ruins, Education in Gaza Will Be Hobbled for Years" from May 2024,[8] Israel's central role in creating the horrors in question is not mentioned anywhere in the article text at all—thus fully *Natural Disaster-izing* the humanitarian crisis being reported on.

For one of the eight, "Nowhere to Go: How Gaza Became a Mass Death Trap," from October 2024, Israel's role is mentioned in the second paragraph but reinforces the IDF's "hunt for Hamas" narrative ("… Israel's military campaign to root out the Hamas militants").[9] In the six other *Very Serious Investigative Pieces* in the *New York Times*, Israel's role isn't mentioned until the fifth paragraph or later—and it is typically framed as a "Israel's campaign against Hamas," rather than a deliberate strategy of inflicting suffering on the civilian population. Take the article, "The 10-Year-Old Boy Who Has Become the Face of Starvation in Gaza."[10] It's an otherwise harrowing account of unspeakable child suffering, but nowhere in the article is there any mention of the dozen points of evidence detailing Israel using starvation as a weapon of war, nor is there any mention of public statements made by Israeli officials detailing this strategy. In an article about mass starvation in Gaza, the *New York Times* felt no reason to point out that Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant explicitly laid out a plan for such a siege tactic, telling reporters on October 9, 2023: "I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, **no food**, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we are acting accordingly."[11]

	Category	Headline	First Time Responsible Party Mentioned				Published
			headline/ subheadline	First 4 paragrahs	Buried (Paragraph 5 or after)	Never mentioned	
	Gaza	*Pregnant in Gaza With Nowhere to Go*				X	06/17/2024
	Gaza	*'A Hellscape': Dire Conditions in Gaza Leave a Multitude of Amputees*			X		06/17/2024
	Gaza	*The Daily Hunt for Food in Gaza*			X		03/12/2024
	Gaza	*With Schools in Ruins, Education in Gaza Will Be Hobbled for Years*				X	05/06/2024
	Gaza	*The 10-Year-Old Boy Who Has Become the Face of Starvation in Gaza*			X		03/09/2024
	Gaza	*Ramadan Begins as Hunger and Fear Stalk Gaza*			X		03/11/2024
	Gaza	War Erases Full Branches of Gazan Family Trees			X		12/17/2023
	Gaza	*Nowhere to Go: How Gaza Became a Mass Death Trap*		X			10/07/2024
	Ukraine	*The Russians Destroyed Their Villages. Now They Rebuild.*	X				05/10/2024
	Ukraine	*Russian Attacks Crush Factories and Way of Life in Ukrainian Villages*	X				04/21/2024
	Ukraine	*How Russia Is Using Ukrainians' Hunger as a Weapon of War*	X				03/29/2022
	Ukraine	*Their Final Moments: Victims of a Russian Atrocity in Bucha*	X				12/21/2022
	Ukraine	*Slowly, Ukrainian Women Are Beginning to Talk About Sexual Assault in the War*	X				03/15/2025
	Oct. 7	*'Screams Without Words': How Hamas Weaponized Sexual Violence on Oct. 7*	X				12/28/2023
	Oct. 7	*The Day Hamas Came*	X				12/22/2023
	Oct. 7	*Behind Hamas's Bloody Gambit to Create a 'Permanent' State of War*	X				11/08/2023
	Oct. 7	*In the Aftermath of the Hamas Attack: Portraits of Survivors*	X				11/03/2023
	Oct. 7	His Mother Was Killed by Hamas. Her Death Transformed His Life	X				10/15/2023
	Oct 7	'I Just Hope That They Are Alive': How Hamas Abducted 150 Israelis	X				10/9/2023
	Oct. 7	Slaughter at a Festival of Peace and Love Leaves Israel Transformed		X			9/30/2024

Figure 4.1 Agency mentions in top stories for the *New York Times*—Gaza versus Ukraine versus October 7 attack.

Contrast this with how the *New York Times* covers hunger in Ukraine in the weeks after Russia's invasion. "How Russia Is Using Ukrainians' Hunger as a Weapon of War," reads one typically explicit Times headline from March 2022.[12] "The grueling nature of sieges—and how they use hunger to turn people's own bodies against them," write *New York Times* reporters Valerie Hopkins, Ben Hubbard, and Gina Kolata, "gives them a psychological power unique among war tactics, according to scholars and siege survivors." No such malicious intent is ever assumed of Israelis.

"Israel's campaign against Hamas and its siege of Gaza" is mentioned in passing, but is never said to be a strategy, *a choice,* much less one motivated by psychological terror or weakening of civilian populations.

Hamas' malicious intent is, of course, centered in the headlines for the *New York Times*' *Very Serious Investigative Pieces* on the October 7 attack: six out of the seven top articles center Hamas' role in the headline or sub-headline, and a seventh mentions it in the fourth paragraph. When a war crime happens to Israelis or Ukrainians, there's almost always an explicit guilty party with sinister motives centered in the framing of the article. When a war crime happens to Palestinians, it is written as if Palestinians have been struck by an earthquake.

CNN fares slightly better, but a double standard is still apparent. Two of the five *Very Serious Investigative Pieces* we detailed in our study mention Israel's role in the headline or sub-headline when reporting on war crimes in Gaza, compared to four out of five for Ukraine and four out of four for reports on the October 7 attack. In some instances, editors intervened directly to remove Israeli responsibility.

One source at CNN recalls such an example. He had helped with an investigative report that documented how a horrific Israeli war crime hurt an individual in Gaza. (The exact report cannot be named because it would reveal our source.) Our source was instructed by an editor to remove key paragraphs explicitly showing Israeli responsibility. We viewed one such email from an editor, who frames the suggested changes as a matter of keeping the piece clean, and

avoiding wading into controversy surrounding the conflict. But our source found the experience deeply demoralizing. "I was depressed," he said. "I felt like they were doubling down on us because this story reverberated too much."

"We were used to feeling deflated, to feeling like we made baby-step progress only to land back at square one after a major incident. But this felt like direct interference because the story resonated with so many people. There wasn't any other way to spin it—or for us to kid ourselves. Rather than us running with the success of our own journalism as we'd ordinarily do, it felt like this editor actively hindered our script to be less condemning of Israel."

"I haven't really gotten over it," he said. "This network, under this management, values Israeli relations over the most basic of human dignities."

FLAK, THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE (ADL), AND INTERNALIZED CENSORING

The ADL is almost always portrayed in the US media as a legitimate civil rights organization, and a fair arbiter of what constitutes antisemitism. But the organization has a long history of advocating for US and Israeli policies of aggression toward Palestinians, and of using research and reports to attack the left and anti-racist movements more broadly. One of its key methods is to draw false equivalencies between critics of human rights abuses against Palestinians, and Nazi or white supremacist extremists, premised on the false assertion that any meaningful criticism of the Israeli government is inherently antisemitic.

This tactic is well-worn by the organization. In 1967, Dore Schary, national chairman of the ADL, criticized the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, an anti-racist organization, for criticizing the Israeli government in a newsletter. Israel's critics are extremists, Schary told the ADL's executive committee, and "they have gained an audience and made an impact, both of which can grow."[13] These remarks were made in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, which resulted in Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, as well

as the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, and the Golan Heights in Syria. In 1993, the ADL was the subject of lawsuits and law enforcement investigations for secretly spying on thousands of political activists for decades, including Arab-American groups and critics of the Israeli government.[14] The organization's intelligence gatherer of 32 years, Roy Bullock, is alleged to have also surveilled the United Auto Workers union, the NAACP, and even anti-apartheid activists, at the behest of the South African government.[15] In the mid-1980s, the ADL launched a propaganda campaign against Nelson Mandela and slammed the African National Congress as "totalitarian, anti-humane, anti-democratic, anti-Israel, and anti-American."[16]

In 2016, the Movement for Black Lives published a policy platform that stated, "The U.S. justifies and advances the global War on Terror via its alliance with Israel and is complicit in the genocide taking place against the Palestinian people." In response, the ADL labeled the movement as antisemitic.[17] And as Black activists called for reprieve from deadly police violence, the ADL worked with police departments, Israeli forces, and even US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on skill shares and joint trainings.[18] Jewish Voice for Peace, a pro-Palestine group, launched a campaign against such "deadly exchanges" that are facilitated by the ADL and a small handful of other organizations.[19]

In recent years, Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the ADL, has been even more overt about the organization's opposition to defenders of Palestinian rights and the left more broadly. In May of 2022, speaking at the group's National Leadership Summit, he said that Palestine solidarity groups like Jewish Voice for Peace, and Muslim civil rights groups like the Council on American–Islamic Relations (CAIR), are "the photo inverse of the extreme right that ADL long has tracked."[20] These remarks provoked alarm among some ADL staffers, who questioned this approach on an internal Zoom meeting, according to leaked audio reported by Mari Cohen and Alex Kane for *Jewish Currents*.[21]

But since October 7, 2023, Greenblatt has grown more overt in his role as a lobbyist for the State of Israel, and since January 2025, the Trump administration itself. Greenblatt's praise of Elon Musk,

a prolific promoter of antisemitic and white supremacist theories, even prompted one top executive to resign from the organization.[22] Meanwhile, the organization has circulated a workplace pledge to fight antisemitism and has urged employers to sign on. On November 9, 2023, seven legal organizations wrote a letter raising concern about this campaign, due to the ADL's reliance on definitions that falsely conflate criticism of the Israeli government with antisemitism. The legal aid organizations, which include the Center for Constitutional Rights, called on employers "to reject attempts to push a distorted definition of antisemitism that aims to censor criticism of Israel and advocacy for Palestinian rights by falsely labeling it anti-Jewish."

Yet, despite this documented record of cynically conflating criticism of Israel with antisemitism, waging attacks on black civil rights leaders, and purveying anti-Palestinian racism, mainstream US press outlets always present the ADL as a liberal anti-racism watchdog, rather than an organ of pro-Israel lobbying. No amount of overt political advocacy on behalf of a nation-state, including calling groups that criticize Israeli weapons makers "antisemitic," it seemed, could remove the anti-racism halo from Greenblatt. Since October 7, Greenblatt has made a series of outlandish, discrediting claims. In addition to mindlessly passing along the "beheaded babies" hoax,[23] Greenblatt equated the keffiyeh, a traditional Palestinian headscarf, with a Nazi symbol on MSNBC,[24] told MSNBC's Katie Phang that "anti-Zionism is genocide,"[25] equated pro-Palestine demonstrations with Nazi rallies,[26] and published a letter arguing pro-Palestine campus groups were engaging in "material support to Hamas." He also repeatedly whitewashed Trump World's antisemitism, praising Elon Musk for his "leadership in fighting hate,"[27] traveling with the Trump White House in 2018 to celebrate its transfer of the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem[28] (a provocative move widely condemned around the globe), and overseeing an award for Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner for his "vital and deeply impactful work on the Abraham Accords."[29] All of which makes sense when one realizes that by "fighting anti-

semitism," the ADL and Greenblatt quite literally mean, defend the State of Israel.

By indexing meaningful criticism of Israel as, by the ADL's own logic, *per se* antisemitism, the ADL had successfully weaponized liberal fears of being perceived as bigoted to promote racism against Arabs, and Palestinians in particular—all while defending Israel's most egregious, flagrant war crimes and not once, post-October 7, criticizing Israeli leadership's overt dehumanization and genocidal language.

The episodes recounted by our sources about newsrooms internalizing responses from groups like the ADL are consistent with a feature of institutional pressure that scholar Noam Chomsky calls "flak."[30] Flak is broadly defined as negative responses to media output from outside groups or other powerful actors. Put another way: dehumanizing Palestinians, or writing lurid sensationalist headlines about Palestinians, or casually accusing Palestinians of lying about how many Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, has very little institutional pushback mechanism. There is no AIPAC or ADL equivalent for Palestinians; there is only a scattering of underfunded human rights groups and relatively powerless pro-Palestine organizations. With this inverted definition of racism, outlets remained, and still remain, fearful of falling into the ADL's crosshairs, and the crosshairs of related pro-Israel lobbying groups, which present themselves as bulwarks against antisemitism. A source at CNN says that he believes the network is motivated, in part, by fear of getting called out by the ADL. Self-censorship is a difficult thing to measure, but numerous sources describe preemptive defensive measures against bad-faith, professional pro-Israel bullies. "Nobody wants to be seen as, 'I'm the anchor who hates Jews or Israel,'" a current CNN employee tells us. "So it's anyone that they can put on to kind of shield them from those accusations of bias, no matter how little vetting gets put into some of these people."

Aymann Ismail, a writer at *Slate Magazine* and president of the Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association, details how reporters, especially Arab reporters, internalize how pro-Israel

pressure groups will scrutinize their coverage, fearful of how their bosses and their bosses' bosses could warp their every word.

> These [Arab journalists] are not there because they want to make Arabs look good. What they're trying to do is, they're trying to get their job done and they notice that when it comes to [Israel–Palestine] in particular, their editors or their publications might be more cautious, not out of a hate for Arabs or not out of a hate for Palestinians, but maybe out of a fear that they themselves will be cast as activists. Maybe they themselves are worried that they will be hounded by these pro-Zionist nonprofit institutions and groups who are waiting for any opportunity to cast any of these organizations as unreliable … I don't want to characterize it as a thing that all journalists were just racist—sometimes it's just them being overly cautious because they know the stakes might be higher for them.

Framing pro-Israel ideologues as precious anti-racism advocates reached self-parody in May 2025 when an anonymous internet troll account called "StopAntisemitism" on X (formerly Twitter) was given legitimacy and weight by the *New York Times*, which relayed their allegation against kids YouTuber Ms. Rachel that she was funded by Hamas as a serious allegation that merited response, rather than the baseless rantings of an online conspiracy theorist.[31] The *New York Times* reported, citing reporting from the *New York Post*, that "the advocacy group StopAntisemitism labeled Accurso the 'Antisemite of the Week.'" (Rachel Griffin-Accurso is the person who plays Ms. Rachel.) And the *New York Times* noted StopAntisemitism "sent a letter urging Attorney General Pam Bondi to investigate whether Accurso is receiving funding to further Hamas' agenda." The *New York Times*' Marc Tracy soberly reported, Accurso, 42, in an emailed response, denied having received money from Hamas. "This accusation is not only absurd, it's patently false," she said.

Would the *New York Times* ever relay allegations from an anonymous internet troll accusing a kids YouTuber who expressed sympathy with Israelis of being on the Mossad payroll? Of course

they would not. These baseless allegations would be sent directly to the email trash folder. But when it comes to smearing Palestinians or those sympathetic to Palestinians, normal, baseline editorial standards, as we will detail more in our next chapter, are thrown out the window in favor of tabloidism, innuendo, and deliberate credulity.

5

How the *New York Times* helped Israel militarize civilians, humanitarian workers in Gaza

On the morning of January 26, 2024, the International Court of Justice, the highest court in the United Nations, was set to announce its much-anticipated ruling on a case brought by South Africa accusing Israel of committing acts of genocide in Gaza.[1] While the court did not find Israel was, at the time, *per se* committing genocide, it determined it was "plausible" the government was and demanded Israel halt "acts of genocide" and await further adjudication. The announcement was watched by millions and included a scathing reading of dozens of genocidal statements made by Israeli officials since October 7 of the previous year.[2] It was the first public admonishment by an international body detailing the criminal acts by Israel in Gaza and was, for obvious reasons, a massive PR blow to Israel and its primary patron, the United States.

Quickly pushing this story off the front pages, conveniently, was another "story" that broke hours before: the institution issuing the ruling, the United Nations, supposedly had "links" to Hamas and several October 7 attackers. On its face, it was a shocking revelation: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, or UNRWA, was secretly in league with Hamas, either actively or by covering it up for them *post-facto*. Or at least this was the vague impression readers were left with. The headlines came rushing in faster than one could process what exactly was going on. From CNN[3] to NBC News[4] to the *Washington Post*[5] to the *New York Times*,[6] based on mere allegation by Israel and the UN rushing to fire those subject to the allegation, stories about UN

aid workers in Gaza carrying out the October 7 "terrorist attack" quickly crowded out stories of the ICJ's live streamed condemnation of Israeli officials' genocidal statements and their ongoing acts of "plausible" genocide.

IGNORING ISRAEL'S LONG HISTORY OF DELIBERATE DISINFORMATION

One recurring feature of *New York Times* coverage of the "Israel–Hamas war" is that the Israeli government can tell as many transparent lies as it wants, and the Israeli government, as a source, is never categorically discredited. Their history of self-serving, since-debunked lies is never brought up. Instead, readers are given the impression these are credible "officials" with serious, well-sourced "intelligence" seeking to provide "information" on "terrorists."

In the opening weeks of Israel's bombing and siege of Gaza, Israeli officials and pro-Israel organizations linked to Israeli officials (the line is often blurry by design), spread clearly fake disinformation. In addition to the aforementioned "beheaded babies" tale repeated by everyone from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to US President Joe Biden, Israeli officials spread a viral video that a "nurse" working in Al-Shifa Hospital claimed Hamas was "stealing the hospital's food, medicine and fuel." The shoddy video was swiftly debunked by anyone with a passing knowledge of Arabic, Hamas, or Al-Shifa Hospital.[7]

Israeli officials also lied about the following major events in just the first 60 days, as Muhammad Shehada of the European Council on Foreign Relations documented:[8]

- On November 5, 2023, the IDF claimed an underground water tank was a "Hamas tunnel" that their ground troops discovered at the Qatari Hospital in Gaza. Several outlets—such as Reuters[9] and the *Telegraph*[10]—put this claim in large print headlines despite experts challenging this lie with detailed maps of the room. (Later, local journalists were finally able to access the area and found Israel was lying.)[11]

- Israel bombed fleeing refugees, killing some 70 people on October 13, 2023. Israel originally denied having done so. An investigation two days later by the *Financial Times* confirmed Israel was lying.[12]
- In November 2023, Israel lied about former Palestinian detainee Mohammed Nazzal, who was beaten and tortured by Israeli prison guards until they broke his hands and denied him medical treatment. Israel denied doing so, even denying his hands were broken at all, until the BBC confirmed with two UK doctors that his hands were indeed broken.[13]
- In November 2023, CNN aired a blatant IDF lie that a calendar showing the days of the week at the al-Rantisi children's hospital was "a guarding list where every terrorist writes his name and every terrorist has his own shift guarding the people that were here."[14] After being mocked on social media by native Arabic speakers who could see it was just days of the week, CNN quietly deleted the clip from its website without any explanation or apology.[15]
- In October 2023, the official Israeli government Twitter/X account claimed a dead child in Gaza was a "doll." That child was quickly identified as Omar al-Banna, killed in an Israeli airstrike.[16]
- In October 2023,[17] Israel bombed Gaza and Lebanon with US-supplied white phosphorus, then denied ever doing so, despite clear videos showing them using white phosphorus. A December 2023 *Washington Post* article confirmed Israel was lying.[18]

Most infamously—and consequentially—Israeli defense social media accounts shared a 3D rendered video on October 27, 2023, supposedly showing what appeared to be a Bond Villain-like "Hamas command-and-control center" buried underneath Al-Shifa Hospital. After Israeli forces raided the hospital and killed—or condemned to death—dozens of patients, this claim was subsequently debunked by the *Washington Post* in a rare instance of adversarial journalism by mainstream US media[19] (more on this later). A

follow-up investigation by *Forensic Architecture* in October 2025 revealed that the video was, according to one summary by the *Washington Post*'s Evan Hill, "an animation the IDF had used the previous year, saying at the time it was a tunnel beneath a UN school."[20]

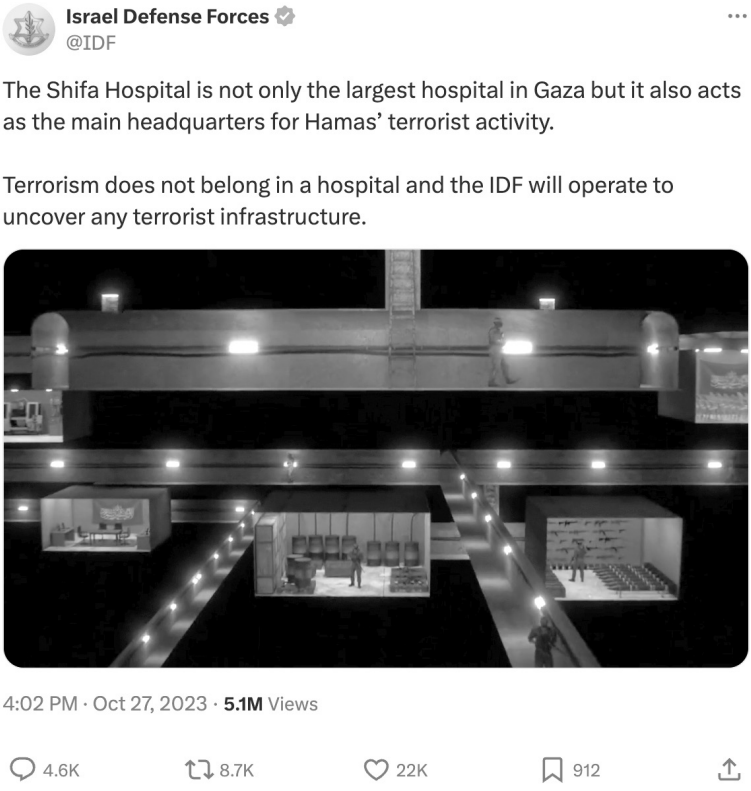
Israel Defense Forces
@IDF
The Shifa Hospital is not only the largest hospital in Gaza but it also acts as the main headquarters for Hamas' terrorist activity.
Terrorism does not belong in a hospital and the IDF will operate to uncover any terrorist infrastructure.
4:02 PM · Oct 27, 2023 · 5.1M Views
4.6K
8.7K
22K
912

Figure 5.1 Twitter screenshot of the "Hamas command-and-control center" buried underneath Al-Shifa Hospital.

The lies coming from Israeli officials were so common that they even had internal scandals where they are caught lying to each other to advance specific political factions within Israel. A major scandal erupted in November 2024 after an IDF soldier and senior Netanyahu aide was caught intercepting "Hamas documents," manipulating them, and leaking them to Germany's largest newspaper *Bild* and the *Jewish Chronicle*.[21]

Yet, somehow, the lies, exaggerations and outright fabrications emanating from Israeli officials at the highest level (to say nothing of dozens of openly genocidal statements) never, in the eyes of the *New York Times*, soured these officials as sources whose unverified claims needn't be qualified as such.

To be clear: It's not as if the *New York Times* is incapable of discrediting states with a track record of lying and making dicey, self-serving claims. After Russia invaded Ukraine, Russian officials began making evidence-free allegations that the US had installed "biolabs" in Ukraine that were posing a clear danger to Russian security. This, like the "Hamas command-and-control center under Al-Shifa Hospital," was an evidence-free claim clearly serving as an *ad hoc* justification for a war crime they were in the process of committing in any event. Thus, the *New York Times* covered the story with the following skeptical headlines:

- "**Theory About U.S.-Funded Bioweapons Labs in Ukraine Is Unfounded**"
- "**Russia's Unfounded Claims** of Secret U.S. Bioweapons Linger On and On: **Without Providing Evidence,** the Kremlin is Pressing Allegations That the U.S. Operates Labs in Ukraine and Beyond"
- "**Truth Is Another Front in Putin's War**: The Kremlin Has Used a Barrage of **Increasingly Outlandish Falsehoods** To Prop Up Its Overarching Claim That the Invasion Of Ukraine Is Justified"
- "China's Echoes of **Russia's Alternate Reality** Intensify Around the World"

It is not only possible for editors at the *New York Times* to discredit state sources with a track record of making claims without evidence while engaging in war crimes—it is something they had done just a year prior.[22] When Israel claimed on the same morning the UN's highest court was accusing them of myriad war crimes, including "plausible" acts of genocide, that this same institution was—through selective, tabloid innuendo—secretly working with "Hamas ter-

rorists," did the *New York Times* meet these claims with the same skepticism and qualification?

They did not. They instead blared the story on the front-page and treated it like it was a major, unfolding scandal. "What to Know About the U.N. Aid Agency for Palestinians: Long a Vital Lifeline for Gazans, the Agency Known as UNRWA Was a Point of Contention with Israel Long Before Some of its Workers Were Accused of Taking Part in the Oct. 7 Attacks on Israel," said one headline and sub-headline from January 26, 2024.[23] "Details Emerge on U.N. Workers Accused of Aiding Hamas Raid: Israeli Officials Have Presented Evidence They Say Ties Workers At A Palestinian Aid Agency in Gaza to Violence During the Hamas-Led Attack on Israel," one front-page story ran 36 hours later.[24]

For reference, here was the *New York Times* homepage the morning of January 27, 2024. The UN court finding that Israel was committing "plausible" acts of genocide and calling on the state to cease doing so is presented as "the International Court of Justice ruled that Israel must prevent genocidal acts in Gaza, but did not call for a cease-fire." In font twice the size and above the headline about ICJ's ruling, Israel's tabloid claims of UNRWA–Hamas conspiracy are presented as *per se* credible because the UN fired the employees in question. No investigation, no due process, no evidence—just accusations and meta-coverage of the UN's response:

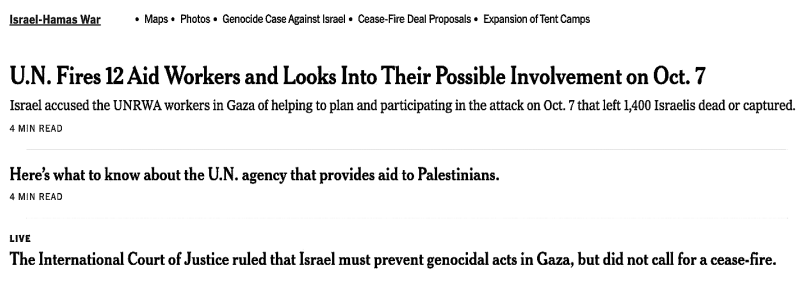
Israel-Hamas War
• Maps • Photos • Genocide Case Against Israel • Cease-Fire Deal Proposals • Expansion of Tent Camps
U.N. Fires 12 Aid Workers and Looks Into Their Possible Involvement on Oct. 7
Israel accused the UNRWA workers in Gaza of helping to plan and participating in the attack on Oct. 7 that left 1,400 Israelis dead or captured.
4 MIN READ
Here's what to know about the U.N. agency that provides aid to Palestinians.
4 MIN READ
LIVE
The International Court of Justice ruled that Israel must prevent genocidal acts in Gaza, but did not call for a cease-fire.

Figure 5.2 Screenshot of the headlines on nytimes.com—January 27, 2024.

The *New York Times*' front-page for January 27, 2024, put their story about Israel's baseless UN accusations in similar prominence

to their story about a UN court finding that Israel is committing "plausible" genocide in Gaza, using the cryptic, agency-free framing of Israel needing to "shun acts of genocide."

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

THE WEATHER
Today, cloudy, dry, high 48. **Tonight,** cloudy, rain arrives late, low 39. **Tomorrow,** cloudy, periodic rain, may change to snow in the evening, high 41. Weather map is on Page B12.

VOL. CLXXIII .... No. 60,046 © 2024 The New York Times Company SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 2024 Prices in Canada may be higher $4.00

Mexico's Haunting Crisis of the Missing
Families looking for loved ones add to the Tree of Hope in Salamanca, Mexico. More than 94,000 people have vanished. Page A5.

U.N. to Explore Workers' Link To Oct. 7 Raid

Fires 12 Aid Employees After Israel's Claims

This article is by ***Farnaz Fassihi, Edward Wong, Russell Goldman*** *and* ***Ronen Bergman.***

The United Nations on Friday fired 12 of its employees in Gaza and began an investigation into them after accusations by Israel that they had helped plan and had participated in the Oct. 7 terrorist assault that left about 1,200 Israelis dead and over 240 captured.

The workers, all men employed by the U.N. agency that aids Palestinians, known by the acronym UNRWA, are subject to a criminal inquiry, two U.N. officials said.

"UNRWA reiterates its condemnation in the strongest possible terms of the abhorrent attacks," said Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the agency. "Any UNRWA employee who was involved in acts of terror will be held accountable, including through criminal prosecution."

In addition, a senior U.N. official, briefed on the accusations, called them "extremely serious and horrific."

UNRWA has long denied Israel's claims that it fuels anti-Israeli incitement in Gaza. But it took a sharply different approach to the more serious accusations on Friday, just days after Israel presented them to the agency.

The accusations quickly led the United States to temporarily halt funding to the organization. UNRWA, which provides social services in the Gaza Strip, has been the

ISRAEL MUST SHUN ACTS OF GENOCIDE, U.N. COURT RULES

NO DECREE TO END WAR

Panel Calls for More Aid for Palestinians and Hostage Releases

This article is by ***Patrick Kingsley, Raja Abdulrahim, Aaron Boxerman*** *and* ***Michael Levenson.***

JERUSALEM — The United Nations' highest court said on Friday that Israel must take action to prevent acts of genocide by its forces in the Gaza Strip, adding to the international pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to reduce death and destruction in the battered Palestinian enclave.

But the court did not rule on whether Israel was committing genocide, and it did not call on Israel to stop its military campaign to crush Hamas, as South Africa, which brought the case, had requested.

While the ruling had elements that each side could embrace, the

JURY SAYS TRUMP OWES $83 MILLION

Compensating Carroll for

Top Museums Shutter Native American Exhibits

Tribes Get More Input as Law Takes Effect

By JULIA JACOBS and ZACHARY SMALL

The American Museum of Natural History will close two major halls exhibiting Native American

sudden to some may seem long overdue to others."

The museum is closing galleries dedicated to the Eastern Woodlands and the Great Plains this weekend, and covering a number of other display cases featuring

Figure 5.3 *New York Times*' front-page from January 27, 2024.

The *Wall Street Journal* would run an even more explosive claim the same day. Citing an Israeli "intelligence dossier," the *Journal*'s breathless headline would read, "Intelligence Reveals Details of U.N. Agency Staff's Links to Oct. 7 Attack." The article would claim that "10% of the Palestinian aid agency's 12,000 staff in Gaza have links to militants."[25]

According to an August 2024 report by Max Tani in Semafor, months later the *Wall Street Journal* paper's top editor overseeing standards would make a startling admission in an internal email. As Tani reported:[26]

> The paper didn't know—and still doesn't know—whether the allegation, based on Israeli intelligence reports, was true. "The fact

> that the Israeli claims haven't been backed up by solid evidence doesn't mean our reporting was inaccurate or misleading, that we have walked it back or that there is a correctable error here," Elena Cherney, the chief news editor, wrote in an email earlier this year seen by Semafor.

Immediately following the one-two punch from the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, over a dozen Western countries initially pulled funding from UNRWA in knee-jerk reactions to these allegations. But quietly, over the next few months, all but the US went back to funding UNRWA, because it became increasingly clear that Israeli claims were a smear campaign without any credible basis. The US continued to cut off funding from UNRWA even though its own intelligence assessment determined that UNRWA does not coordinate with Hamas in any meaningful way,[27] and it could not verify that a small handful of the agency's staff had allegedly participated in the October 7 attack. Close Biden ally Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), while pushing for a restart of UNRWA funding, went further, calling UNRWA–Hamas connection claims "flat out lies."[28]

Over a year later, once the smear campaign had served its purpose and UN aid had been all but decimated and starvation in Gaza widespread, the media had mostly moved on. In May 2025, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini published a statement making clear that Israel had failed to "share adequate evidence" to support its accusations against UNRWA and its neutrality—accusations that Israel would later use to justify banning UNRWA from East Jerusalem and labeling it a "terrorist group," and that both Presidents Biden and Trump would use to justify cutting off financial support for the agency. Despite 20 months of allegations, Lazzarini says, "UNRWA has not received any response" from Israel to its repeated requests for proof they had condoned or supported the attacks on October 7."[29] This was followed by a UN court finding in October 2025 that Israel could not "substantiate the allegations" Hamas had meaningfully infiltrated UNRWA, noting that Israel

refused to cooperate with UN investigators or provide any evidence to support their allegations.[30]

But the truth was secondary; the point was the splashy headlines and panicking the White House and other Western governments to cut off aid and discredit those charged with sustaining life in Gaza. What followed afterwards was of little importance: The damage had been done.

What, in retrospect, is especially bizarre about the whole affair is that even if one accepted the premise that some small percentage of UNRWA employees *were* secretly moonlighting as militants, this was a standard of institutional guilt, quickly and without explanation, invented on the morning of January 26, 2024. There is no previous example of an institution the size of UNRWA—with tens of thousands of employees—presented as *per se* responsible for the actions of 0.04 percent of its employees. The *New York Times* never bothered to explain how, even if one accepts Israel's version of events, this framing made any sense. Was the general idea that an aid organization operating in a besieged territory with 2 million people, providing life-sustaining aid, is supposed to also have a full-time monitoring system for all its employees and what they do after hours? Are they supposed to tail 30,000 employees with drones? With private investigators? What exactly was the scandal here?

It wasn't supposed to make sense. The point was to use the words "UNRWA" and "October 7" and "terrorist" as many times as possible in the same paragraph. The point was to pander to editors', reporters', and readers' prejudices and ignorance about the role of the UN in Palestine and vaguely smear humanitarian and aid groups working in Gaza. The point was to make international aid that sustained life impossible to operate—which it succeeded in doing, all with the help of major publications like the *New York Times*, which, repeatedly in its reporting, left unmentioned that the Israeli right had been working to remove UNRWA from Gaza for years—long before October 7, 2023.[31] Not only because it provided life-sustaining aid to a Gaza population Israeli officials wish to "put on a diet,"[32] but because, on a basic ideological level, it reinforced the premise

that the majority of those in Gaza are refugees—which they legally remain in the eyes of international law.

Thus, UNRWA's continued existence sustained land claims for Palestinians in cities and villages where they were expelled in 1948 and 1967. A March 2024 report in the *Guardian*, citing internal UN documents, reveals a widespread pattern of obstruction and harassment of UNRWA employees by occupying Israeli forces in the West Bank, where Hamas has no meaningful presence.[33] "It is time UNRWA be dismantled," Netanyahu said in 2017.[34]

Was this essential dynamic centered in any of the *New York Times* articles, uncritically echoing Israeli claims smearing UNRWA? Was this bit of context that could maybe color the readers' perspective of these so-called "Hamas ties" ever expanded on in reporting by the *New York Times*? It was not. Again, context is an anathema: It's seen as unduly sympathetic to Palestinians, too cynical about Israeli motives, and veers too far outside the *Officials Say* mode of reportage, where only one side is a *Respectable State* with *Serious Officials* and the other side is either disparate victims or an inherently untrustworthy band of terrorists. All history and context are thus removed, and one is given the distinct impression by the *New York Times* that the United Nations was yet another organ in a global Hamas-directed conspiracy.

"HAMAS STRONGHOLDS" AND TERROR TUNNELS

The *New York Times* repeatedly referred to places that Israel was bombing, invading, or starving—typically with dozens or hundreds of civilian deaths—as "Hamas strongholds" without defining what this concept means, or what places were, in their editorial judgment, *not* Hamas "strongholds." "Hamas strongholds" were, in effect, whatever area or building Israel was attacking at the time. Needless to say, neither the *New York Times* nor any other major American outlet ever referred to any city or town in Israel as an "IDF stronghold," though polls show widespread Israeli support for the IDF, and IDF military positions, including underground bunkers, are peppered throughout the civilian population.

In one typically sleazy example from October 31, 2023, the *New York Times* reported on the IDF bombing of the Jabalia refugee camp that killed upwards of 120 people (including dozens of children) as a strike targeting a "Hamas stronghold." the *New York Times* headline read, "Israel Strike Targets Hamas Stronghold in Dense Gaza Area; Hospital Reports Many Deaths." This was a refugee camp housing entire families, but with a single word it's vaguely converted into a military bunker in urgent need of leveling. (Relatedly, the *New York Times* would go to comical lengths to avoid using the term "refugee camp," giving us the now-infamous June 21, 2024, headline, "Strike on Area Where Displaced Gazans Were Camped Kills Up to 25").[35]

The *New York Times* used the term "Hamas stronghold" and variations of the phrase 154 times from October 2023 to October 2024, almost always while reporting on war crimes or pending war crimes. Indeed, the *New York Times*, at one point or another, referred to the top five most populated cities in Gaza as "Hamas strongholds":

1. Gaza City: "It Remains Uncertain What Israel Will Do with Gaza City, Hamas's Stronghold"—October 14, 2023
2. Khan Yunis: "A Closer Look at Three Hamas Strongholds Targeted by Israel (Khan Yunis is No. 1)"—December 11, 2023
3. Jabaliya: "Jabaliya has long been considered a Hamas stronghold"—December 11, 2023
4. Rafah: "last Hamas stronghold in Gaza"—May 2, 2024
5. Beit Lahiya: The *New York Times* uncritically repeats IDF claims that Beit Lahiya's main hospital is "Stronghold for Hamas"—December 27, 2024

If every major population center—the only five cities with over 100,000 pre-war population—in Gaza is a "Hamas stronghold," then how is this a meaningful label? What exactly is the reader supposed to do with this information? It has no analytical utility other than to not-so-subtly militarize the entire civilian population of Gaza in the mind of the reader. In 2015 the *New York Times*' infamously reported on an ISIS suicide bombing that killed 43 and maimed over 200 civilians in a food market and mosque in Beirut in an article with

the headline, "Deadly Blasts Hit Hezbollah Stronghold in Southern Beirut."[36] The framing was widely criticized on social media, and the *New York Times* eventually changed its headline. (The *New York Times* even published a half-hearted *mea culpa* following the controversy.)[37] The *New York Times* would never frame an ISIS attack in a downtown Paris food market and church with the headline, "Deadly Blasts Hit NATO Stronghold in Paris," but the paper of record had no problem doing this for Arabs in Lebanon. Referring to Paris, London, or New York, after an ISIS attack on civilians as a "NATO stronghold" would be seen as effectively doing free propaganda for ISIS. Why was it not for their Arab victims, whose only crime was being Shia Muslim and shopping for food and being near a house of worship on a Thursday afternoon?

While the context is different, a similar dehumanizing effect is achieved when sites of mass civilian death in Gaza are callously referred to as "Hamas strongholds." Justifying airstrikes that kill hundreds of civilians by claiming that the struck site was an enemy "stronghold," even though Israel very often doesn't bother producing any evidence of any military personnel or activity at the site, serves no other purpose than to posthumously conscript the dead men, women, and children buried under rubble as Hamas militants who, either directly or indirectly, had it coming. Would any mainstream outlet ever refer to the border communities near Gaza attacked on October 7 as "Zionist strongholds" or "IDF strongholds"? Of course not—even if they *are,* using Hamas stronghold guilt-by-political support criteria. Doing so would rightly be seen as an implicit justification for their deaths. What purpose does this framework serve other than implying that the civilians who were killed had it coming because many of them support, in some abstract and ill-defined way, Hamas? If spatial proximity to Hamas fighters means one's killing is already justified, then Israel has a built-in justification for eliminating or displacing anyone and everyone living in the 25-by-5-mile densely populated strip of land that is Gaza—which is, of course, the whole point of the "stronghold" label.

The *New York Times* was also central to selling liberal readers on the general idea that Israel could wholesale level all of Gaza, and it

was justified because an elaborate maze of Hamas tunnels was virtually everywhere. And indeed these tunnels were said to be *more likely* buried under sensitive civilian infrastructure—like schools and hospitals—which, it's worth noting, is a claim no one in Israeli or US intelligence has ever shown to be statistically true. In one four-day span in late October 2023, the *New York Times* ran three different articles, sourced largely from "Israeli intelligence," and recycling the same basic talking points, handwringing over *What Was To Be Done* about Hamas' sprawling network of tunnels:

- October 27, 2023: "As Gazans Scrounge for Food and Water, Hamas Sits on a Rich Trove of Supplies: Hamas has spent years stockpiling desperately needed fuel, food and medicine, as well as ammo and weapons, in the miles of tunnels it has carved out under Gaza."[38]
- October 28, 2023: "Gaza's Tunnels Loom Large for Israel's Ground Forces: Hamas is believed to hide weapons, fighters and even command centers in miles of subterranean pathways and chambers."[39]
- October 30, 2023: "Gaza's Vital Tunnels: Hamas needs its maze of tunnels to fight. But more than two million people live above the underground network, a layer of human life between military targets and Israeli missiles."[40]

The *New York Times* focused intently on the "terror tunnel" issue early on as the body count began to mount, culminating in a particularly glib explainer by liberal opinion-shaper David Leonhardt (more on Leonhardt in Chapter 9), who built a whole article around it for his very popular *The Morning* newsletter. He wrote (along with Lauren Jackson) on October 30, 2023,

> The battle over the tunnels is a major reason that this war already has a high civilian death toll. More than two million people live above the tunnels—a layer of human life between many Hamas targets and Israeli missiles. Hamas has hidden many weapons under hospitals, schools and mosques so that Israel risks killing

> civilians, and facing an international backlash, when it fights. Hamas fighters also slip above and below ground, blending with civilians.[41]

Citing a 2014 *Washington Post* article—an article that largely relies on Israeli and pro-Israel sources—Leonhardt casually asserts that these tunnels are *deliberately* placed under hospitals, schools, and mosques so that they can be used as protection from bunker busters aiming for the tunnels.[42] Surely, such a major claim would require more neutral sourcing, or evidence, or some type of demonstrable methodology for coming to this conclusion (rather than, say, concluding that tunnels in urban areas naturally undergird all types of infrastructure, by definition). Also left unmentioned is the fact that Israel, as well, has miles of tunnels under its civilian infrastructure, including placing military assets like the head of Mossad in downtown Tel Aviv.[43] But Leonhardt was unconcerned with these deeper questions, or double standards, and instead decided to casually condemn thousands of Palestinians to death because they—almost to a person—are allegedly in the way of Israeli bombs and their justified targets. No questioning of the basic premise, no interrogation of the thin, self-serving claims, nothing remotely journalistic or critical. Just mindless IDF stenography and reassurances to his liberal readers that the carnage streaming across their phones is both inevitable and justified.

THE *NEW YORK TIMES* HELPS ISRAEL LAUNDER "INTELLIGENCE" TO PUT A TARGET ON GAZA SCHOOLS-TURNED-SHELTERS

The *New York Times*' practice of laundering "Israeli intelligence" wasn't limited to militarizing just UN aid agencies and, as we will discuss, hospitals. It also extended to the Gaza education system and its over 200 UN-run schools, most of which were converted into shelters for Palestinian civilians post-Israeli bombardment.

On December 16, 2024, Israel bombed two schools-turned-shelters: the Khalil Oweida School in Beit Hanoun and the Ahmed bin

Abdul Aziz School in Khan Younis, killing over 60. A week later, the *New York Times* helped Israel disseminate supposed "secret internal Hamas documents" claiming "24 people employed by UNRWA" in 24 schools were "members of Hamas or Islamic Jihad." In the sensationalist headline, "Records Seized by Israel Show Hamas Presence in U.N. Schools," reporters Jo Becker and Adam Rasgon mention in paragraph 7 that "The *Times* had no way to independently authenticate the records," but "they bear similarities with other Hamas records that the *Times* has examined."[44]

There's a problem, however: As Drop Site's Sharif Abdel Kouddous and Jeremy Scahill reported on December 17, 2024, a key source the *New York Times* relied on to "verify" Hamas documents insists he was given only limited access to the evidence, and that his doubts about the veracity of said documents were omitted by the *New York Times* journalists. In reference to another Israeli intelligence scoop involving "Hamas documents," Kouddous and Scahill would report:[45]

> Salah al-Din al-Awawdeh, whom the paper described as "a Hamas member and a former fighter in its military wing who is now an analyst based in Istanbul," said a Times reporter only permitted him to review one page of the 30 pages of documents the *New York Times* asked him to verify. Al-Awawdeh, according to WhatsApp messages seen by Drop Site News, told a Times reporter that without seeing more of the document "it is hard to judge" its authenticity. "I asked for the other pages and he said he couldn't send them to me but he said he could read them to me at a later time and I told him that wouldn't work, if I could see the pages, it would be preferable," al-Awawdeh told Drop Site. The *New York Times* never provided al-Awawdeh with additional pages and subsequently cited him in an October 12 story as the only named source for its verification of what it described as "Minutes of Hamas's secret meetings" that "provide a detailed record of the planning for the Oct. 7 terrorist attack" …
>
> Al-Awawdeh told Drop Site that the *New York Times* only shared one page out of 30 with him. After looking it over, he said

> he told Times reporter Adam Rasgon that there was a particular phrase in the document that he suspected was a translation and that the person who wrote it did not sound native in Arabic. "I told [Rasgon], 'This looks translated, it doesn't look real. This phrase is out of context, it is not used, and its meaning is not clear,'" al-Awawdeh told Drop Site. The phrase in question roughly translates to English as "air cover." "I told him it might be translated from another language, that whomever wrote it translated it literally but it is not used in the modern Arabic context." Al-Awawdeh also shared a voice note with Drop Site he says he sent to Rasgon where he raises his doubts. Al-Awawdeh asked to see the other pages, noting that the unusual phrase "might be something that is clarified in the preceding pages or the pages after," but Rasgon refused, he said. Al-Awawdeh said he told Rasgon that "the appearance of the document and the things outlined in it, seem like it could be real—but it doesn't mean it couldn't have been forged because he could have gotten hold of the minutes of a meeting and someone changed what was in it. And I raised doubts about this phrase within the document."

The *New York Times*' own "ex-Hamas" source sowed doubts about the *New York Times*' reporting he was said to have verified, and was reportedly provided extremely limited access for no apparent reason. This fact was subsequently omitted by Times reporters, displaying a pattern of bad-faith, sloppy journalism.

Also left out of the *New York Times*' December 8, 2024, report on Hamas fighters supposedly working for UN-run schools, was any mention of previous intelligence-manufacturing scandals, including ones it was now consensus were fraudulent, namely, as mentioned earlier, Israel fabricating Hamas phone "intercepts," and Israeli officials planting in *Bild* and the *Jewish Chronicle* false stories about supposed "internal Hamas documents" claiming to show that Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar did not want a ceasefire in Gaza.[46] There was seemingly no amount of lying or false evidence-planting Israel could engage in that would ever discredit their officials as implicitly reliable sources, or even merit mention when reporting

on explosive, consequential claims of UN-Hamas partnerships that the *New York Times*, themselves, admitted they "had no way to independently authenticate."

AL-SHIFA HOSPITAL AND HOW THE *NEW YORK TIMES* HELPED TURN A MEDICAL FACILITY INTO THE BIN LADEN COMPOUND

Arguably, the *New York Times*' most consequential intelligence laundering effort was their panicked copy-and-paste job detailing an alleged "Hamas command-and-control center" under Al-Shifa Hospital in the lead-up to the bombing and raiding of the hospital in November 2023.

At the time, Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City was the only major world-class hospital operating in Gaza. From cancer treatments to advanced surgery, it was an essential lifeline for thousands of Palestinians unable to travel outside of Gaza for complex medical treatment. Today, it sits largely in ruins, able to only carry out basic healthcare functions.

It makes sense from a strategic standpoint why Israel would want to clear out and occupy Al-Shifa. Doing so was consistent with the Israeli government's October 13 evacuation order for Northern Gaza that included every single person in Northern Gaza, explicitly those in hospitals. Israeli military officials called the Al-Shifa Hospital staff dozens of times, warning them, telling them to leave pursuant to the October 13 evacuation order for Northern Gaza. For obvious reasons, hospitals would be the last place where people would be sheltering, given the inherently sensitive nature of the patients, namely the thousands suffering from Israel's bombing and starvation campaign and the assumption that it would be a safe space that Israel wouldn't attack. To actually clear all of Northern Gaza of Palestinians would, by definition, require attacking, occupying, and clearing out their largest hospital.[47]

And Israel was determined, by their own public statements, to carry out their evacuation order—as part of what Haaretz[48] and Human Rights Watch[49] alike would later deem an ethnic cleans-

ing campaign—to the letter. The medical staff and patients who remained at Al-Shifa Hospital would be a barrier to doing so.

Cut to late October 2023, when Israel began developing a thin pretext to raid, attack, and occupy the hospital. They couldn't simply tell Western media they were doing so because it was consistent with their evacuation order and broader plans for ethnic cleansing of Northern Gaza. So they began to push stories out to the press of underground "Hamas command-and-control centers" that bordered on self-parody. In addition to the aforementioned 3D blender video showing a network of elaborate Hamas tunnels and rooms that we now know never existed, Israeli officials used the *New York Times* to launder bogus intelligence to salvage their absurd claims once it was clear they were untrue.

Throughout the build-up to the Al-Shifa raid in November 2023, the *New York Times* would frequently present the hospital as a war zone, with patients caught in the middle of two opposing, symmetrical armies in a "battle," despite Israel never providing any evidence that shooting was coming from the hospital itself. "Gaza City Hospitals Are Caught in Deadly Crossfire," a breathless *New York Times* headline from November 10 read. "Battling Hamas fighters, Israeli forces are 'closing in' on hospitals where thousands of people are stranded."[50]

The impression given in the headline and the reporting itself is that the hospital was swarming with Hamas fighters attacking Israeli forces from *within the hospital*—thus making it, in the eyes of *Times*' liberal readers, a legitimate military target. But even according to Israel's later official account, this is not at all what happened. US and Israeli intelligence, according to a later *New York Times* report, claimed that "Hamas fighters evacuated the complex days before Israeli forces moved into Al-Shifa."[51] Then why, on November 10, five days before Israel raided the hospital, was the *New York Times* reporting "Gaza City's hospitals were increasingly under siege on Friday, with hundreds of seriously ill and wounded patients and thousands of displaced people stranded on hospital grounds as intense, close-quarters combat between Israeli troops and Hamas fighters raged around them"?[52]

How can Hamas fighters "rage around" the hospital patients days before Israel's raid when, according to Israeli officials, they had all left days prior? What does this even mean? Fighters no doubt had attacked Israeli military convoys on their *way* to the hospital, but there is zero evidence they were attacking Israeli forces from *inside the hospital* as the *New York Times* repeatedly suggests.

Routinely, those skeptical of the "command-and-control center" claim weren't presented as civilian humanitarian groups, such as former executive director of Human Rights Watch Ken Roth,[53] Norwegian physician Mads Gilbert[54] who had worked at Al-Shifa for 16 years, or the director of the hospital, Dr. Mohammed Abu Selmia, and other medical staff.[55] It was only presented as a "he said/he said" between Israel and "Hamas"—which is, obviously, in the eyes of most *New York Times* readers, a lying terrorist organization. "Israel Says Al Shifa Hospital Conceals Hamas Underground Command Centers," the *New York Times* would report. "The group denies the accusation, saying Israel has offered "fabricated" evidence.[56]

In the *New York Times* reporting, only "Hamas" ever denied the accusation that there was an elaborate terror lair under Al-Shifa Hospital. Yet so did human rights groups and medical staff who worked, or had worked, at the hospital recently, but they were simply ignored by the *New York Times*. The issue was thus chalked up to a matter of an Israeli claim versus a "Hamas" denial—a publicity contest the *New York Times* knew Israel would always win, by default. As Dr. Mads Gilbert noted at the time, correctly it turns out, to cover something like this up would require thousands and thousands of foreign volunteers, medical staff, and aid workers involved in a massive conspiracy. Dr. Gilbert and former head of Human Rights Watch Ken Roth also noted that if the best evidence Israel could present that Hamas was running a command-and-control center from inside and underneath a hospital for over ten years was a CGI rendering, this didn't make for a very strong case justifying the killing of hundreds of patients.

In February 2024, despite the *Washington Post*'s thorough debunking that previous December of the "command-and-control center" claim, the *New York Times* tried to salvage the narrative by again

laundering "Israeli intelligence." In their article, "A Tunnel Offers Clues to How Hamas Uses Gaza's Hospitals," reporters Matthew Rosenberg, Ronen Bergman, Aric Toler and Helmuth Rosales cite "classified Israeli intelligence documents, obtained and reviewed by the *New York Times*," to create a 3D model of a supposed "700 foot" tunnel underneath the hospital that did not, curiously, come close to touching any hospital buildings or have any entrances or exits inside the hospital. Despite the sensationalist headline, the article itself concedes in paragraph 7 that "the Israeli military, however, has struggled to prove that Hamas maintained a command-and-control center under the facility." But don't worry—they have an excuse for this, telling the reader that Israeli military officials ran out of time to show the alleged complex because of the ceasefire in late November. It's unclear why the IDF didn't find this supposed evidence for "five underground complexes" which also contained a "tunnel network [that] could be reached from wards inside a hospital building" later on, during any of their half dozen other raids on the hospital in subsequent months.

Israeli officials made a specific claim: that there existed an elaborate network of tunnels and large rooms underneath Al-Shifa that could be—and were—accessed via the hospital and the hospital complex. This claim, even when citing impossible-to-verify "Israeli intelligence," turned out to be entirely untrue. Israel controlled the hospital complex for weeks during various occupations and never once produced any evidence to this effect. Rather than making this the story, the *New York Times* dressed up a totally unrelated claim using "classified Israeli intelligence" (conveniently shown to the *New York Times* and the *New York Times* only) that there may have been a single tunnel approximately underneath Al-Shifa that didn't touch the actual hospital in question. Rather than frame this as a story of Israeli officials lying, repeatedly and with a clear motive to do so, with the aim of exterminating or removing hundreds of patients and medical staff and carrying out their October 13, 2023, evacuation order, it's presented as Israeli officials being wrong—but maybe sort of right if you squint hard enough.

The *New York Times* had a narrative to salvage. And, unlike the *Washington Post*, it was concerned with assisting Israel's PR campaign by repeatedly moving goal posts, relying on 3D mockups rather than verifiable evidence, not examining ulterior motives, and using innuendo and sensationalist framing to mislead its readers into accepting the most pro-Israel frame possible.

6

Sunday morning news shows, editorial boards, *Morning Joe*, and how "agenda-setting" news limited the debate to "how many Palestinians should die"

In this chapter, we will discuss the one-sided, ahistoric, and shallow coverage of so-called "agenda-setting" TV news and editorial boards. These media self-identify as influential, insider beltway opinion shapers that set the terms of the public conversation for the coming day or week for influential people in Washington. Included in this analysis will be the editorial board outputs of the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, daily weekday morning show—and then-President Joe Biden's favorite program[1]—*Morning Joe* on MSNBC and the weekly Sunday news programs NBC's *Meet the Press*, ABC's *This Week*, CBS's *Face the Nation*, and CNN's *State of the Union*.

These programs and editorials do not garner the highest ratings, and they are not, especially in an age of social media, at the forefront of public discourse. But, I will argue, they are central to shaping the ideological boundaries for policy-making elites: lawmakers, White House aides, corporate executives, and others in the media. Their overwhelming pro-Israel bias, erasure of Palestinian voices, and open incitement in favor of more bombing is thus of major consequence.

SUNDAY MORNING NEWS SHOWS

We conducted a study of the coverage of NBC's *Meet the Press*, ABC's *This Week With George Stephanopoulos*, CBS's *Face the Nation*, and

CNN's *State of the Union* with Jake Tapper and Dana Bash, looking at the one-year period from October 2023 to October 2024. We found that of the 208 hours the Sunday shows were on-air, only one of these shows, CBS's *Face the Nation*, featured a single Palestinian guest—Husam Zomlot, the Palestinian ambassador to the United Kingdom, who appeared in a seven-minute *Face the Nation* interview on November 5, 2023.[2]

By contrast, the Sunday shows featured Israeli guests 20 times—either government officials or families of Israeli hostages. Netanyahu alone made five appearances—once on each of the three network shows, and twice on CNN's *State of the Union*. (White House officials appeared 59 times, most frequently national security adviser Jake Sullivan, White House national security communications adviser John Kirby, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.)

None of the shows featured any Palestinian academics, activists, or spokespeople for human rights groups. And, although politicians and government officials typically dominate the guest lists for these programs, Palestinian-American Representative Rashida Tlaib was never featured. In fact, she has not appeared on any of the shows since 2019. Netanyahu, a leading participant in the conflict, is clearly a relevant person to interview—just not in the way that the Sunday shows did. The anchors on ABC, CBS, and NBC would include one or two semi-difficult questions,[3] usually about starvation and/or credible accusations of war crimes. But they mostly allowed Netanyahu to run through his talking points and outright lies without meaningful pushback.[4]

CNN's Bash, who interviewed Netanyahu both times he appeared on *State of the Union*, didn't even pretend to hold him accountable. In her first interview, from November 2023, she began by accepting the premise that Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City was sitting atop a "Hamas command-and-control center" (a claim, as we note in Chapter 5, later debunked by the *Washington Post*), and vaguely expressed concern for "patients in the hospital." She did not ask Netanyahu to present any evidence of the claim. Nor did she drill down on the issue of Israeli war crimes, both current and former. Instead, she parroted the US State Department's mild chiding about

whether or not "too many civilians have died," with the implication that there is some undefined level of acceptable Palestinian civilian deaths. In her second interview with Netanyahu, from March 2024, Bash avoided issues of civilian deaths altogether. She also, again, avoided any questions about credible accusations of war crimes and deliberate starvation, instead playing safely within the confines of domestic Israeli politics and whether Netanyahu should "call for new elections."[5]

The discrepancy between the kind of language used on the Sunday shows to describe violence leveled against Israelis versus violence leveled against Palestinians was also on stark display—consistent with the asymmetry of emotive words in print and cable news media that we laid out in previous chapters.

Palestinian deaths far outpaced those of Israelis during the end of our survey period—by some counts in a ratio of 150 to 1.[6] While more than 800 Israeli civilians were killed on October 7, at least 14,000 Palestinian children had been killed by the end of our survey period (the number is likely much higher). Tens of thousands of Palestinian children have been maimed—at one point, ten children a day had to have one or both legs amputated.[7] Nineteen thousand children had been orphaned by the end of our survey period.[8] A December 2024 study by the War Child Alliance charity found that 96 percent of children in Gaza felt that their deaths were imminent, and almost half wanted to die as a result of the trauma they had been through. The study also found that 92 percent of the children in Gaza were "not accepting of reality," 79 percent suffered from nightmares, and 73 percent exhibited symptoms of aggression.[9]

The average media consumer would be totally ignorant of this lopsided civilian suffering watching the Sunday shows—indeed, they would have the opposite impression. The word "massacre" was used on the Sunday shows to describe violence against Israelis 33 times and only twice for Palestinians. The word "slaughter" was used 33 times to describe violence against Israelis and only three times for Palestinians. The word "brutal" was used 79 times for acts targeting Israelis and four for those affecting Palestinians.

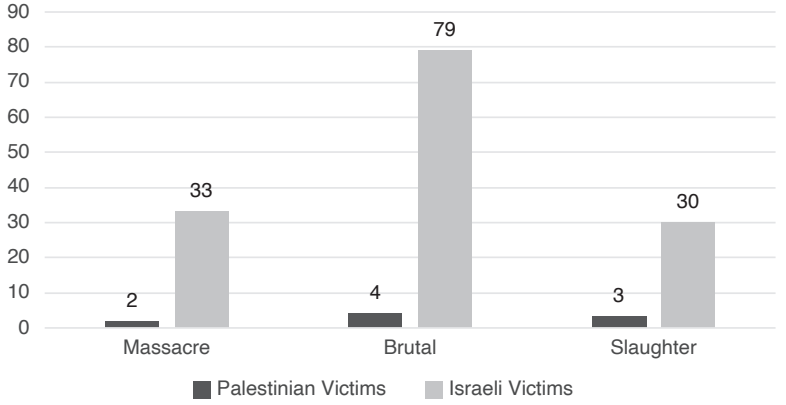

Figure 6.1 Use of emotive words to describe the killings of Palestinians and Israelis on CNN and MSNBC Sunday shows over the course of the first year of the conflict.

Despite credible reports of mass rape of Palestinian captives and numerous documented cases of the Israeli military using Palestinians as human shields, reports of Israel doing so were not mentioned once on any of the Sunday shows. Claims of mass rapes targeting Israelis, however, were mentioned 15 different times, and the term "human shields" was used to describe alleged actions by Palestinians 37 different times.

The shows used the doubt-sowing pejorative qualifier "Hamas-run" 31 times when citing Palestinian civilian deaths (as in, "according to the Hamas-run Ministry of Health"). Meanwhile, the shows cited Israeli death counts as matters of fact with no sourcing. The term "right to defend itself" was used 149 times, all in reference to Israel. Palestine or Palestinians were never said by any anchors, reporters, or guests to possess any such right. "Israeli hostages" were mentioned 835 times, while "Palestinian prisoners" were mentioned 52 times, and every time it was only in the context of a prisoner exchange pursuant to the release of the Israeli hostages. There was no reporting on, interviewing families of, or acknowledging the thousands of Palestinian hostages inside Israeli detention facilities, languishing for years without trial.

Antisemitism was mentioned 65 times on the Sunday shows during our survey period, while "Islamophobia" or anti-Muslim/anti-Palestinian racism was only mentioned four times.

The overall tone of the coverage was uncritical of US involvement in the "Hamas-Israel war," remaining safely within the limited confines of "Is the US doing enough to protect civilians?" handwringing. Consistent with our analyses in previous chapters, virtually all the discussion of Gaza framed the US as a humanitarian force working for a ceasefire and trying to mitigate civilian harm, rather than what the US objectively was: an active participant in one side of the conflict. The Sunday shows repeatedly let Biden officials come on, seemingly whenever they wished. Sullivan appeared 21 times, Kirby 16 times, and Blinken ten times. All painted the administration as a neutral third party working to broker peace and provide humanitarian aid—a portrait that was wholly unchallenged. To the extent that rare tough questions were asked, they involved mild criticism over the US' unwillingness to rein in Israel.[10] To the extent that there was critical reporting or interviewing, it was over excesses and execution. There was no mention in any of the shows of the thousands of Palestinian hostages[11] being held by Israel, no mention of apartheid,[12] no mention of the widespread sexual abuse of Palestinian detainees,[13] no discussion of the siege, repeated bombings, and a policy of starvation waged against Gaza pre-October 7.[14] There was simply a "brutal" "massacre" and "slaughter" of Israelis, then a war of defense, followed by some unfortunate but unavoidable "excess civilian deaths."

Make Sure Palestinian Children Are Being Bombed on 600 Calories A Day

Major editorial boards, like Sunday news shows and *Morning Joe*, are influential beltway arbiters of politics that establish—and aggressively police—the acceptable bounds of "Political Seriousness," namely on the American Left. We will focus on the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* editorial boards because they are the only two in the Center-Left that still carry sway and help mold news and pundit priorities for the days that follow.

The *New York Times* editorial board wrote six editorials on Gaza in the first six months after October 7, all of which supported the basic premises of Israel's assault on Gaza, and none of which ever called for a permanent ceasefire or a political solution. The *New York Times* largely echoed the Biden White House line, or the liberal Zionist conventional wisdom, that defended the underlying logic of the "war," placing the primary blame for the carnage on Hamas, reiterating terms of surrender, all while feigning Deep Concern for the increasingly embarrassing and inevitable carnage. Two editorials in the immediate aftermath of the October 7 attack, published on October 9[15] and October 14,[16] firmly established the board's support for Israel's alleged war aim of "breaking the power of Hamas," for which they argued Israel "deserves the support of the United States and the rest of the world." These editorials, handwaving away genocidal statements made by Israeli officials at the time, reinforced every underlying liberal premise of the "war," including an alleged effort to carefully "protect civilians" while "ending Hamas' control over Gaza"—whatever that meant. That no one in Israeli leadership had, to that point or ever, expressed any support for this supposedly targeted, liberal framework did not deter the *New York Times* editorial board from throwing its support behind these leaders.

Like the White House and liberals and progressives in Congress who refused to support a ceasefire while demanding Israeli leadership change its fundamental nature by applying an ill-defined level of precision to its assault, the *New York Times* would, during the critical early months, ignore objective reality while championing a normative, entirely theoretical "targeted" war on Hamas that simply did not and would never exist.

As the death toll in Gaza began, predictably, to balloon in the weeks that followed, the *New York Times* pivoted into a more lamenting, handwringing tone without changing its position.[17] A November 3 *New York Times* editorial took its cues from the Biden White House, calling for a "temporary pause" while explicitly opposing a long-term ceasefire. After the standard throat clearing about how "Israel has a right to defend itself," Hamas was a "terrorist group" hellbent on "the destruction of the Jewish state" that

had "long hidden themselves in mosques and schools and hospitals, intentionally placing civilians in harm's way," the editorial graciously demanded Israel permit some aid to get in for a brief, but ill-defined time period before Israel recommenced its fundamentally justified siege and bombing campaign. "A pause in hostilities between Hamas and the Israel Defense Forces would not be, as Mr. Netanyahu declared recently, a surrender to terrorism," the *New York Times* clarified, "nor is a pause the equivalent of a cease-fire, as a White House official noted. Israel has warned that a blanket cease-fire would accomplish little at this point other than allowing Hamas time to regroup."[18]

The *New York Times*, like the White House, wanted to feed Palestinians so they could be bombed on 600 calories a day. This position, which we call *Make Sure Palestinian Children Are Being Bombed on 600 Calories A Day,* was the acceptable left flank of liberal opinion, even as Israel's genocidal motives grew more apparent by the day. The *New York Times* editorial board agreed with an implicit Israeli and US plan, reported on at the time in Israeli media, to use the terror of Israel's bombing campaign to engage in forcible population transfers—a war aim later explicitly advocated for by Netanyahu once Biden left office and there was little need for liberal niceties.[19] Such a pause, the *New York Times* editorial board would tell us, would "allow more of the millions of civilians who remain in Gaza an opportunity to move to relative safety until the hostilities end."

The *New York Times*' opposition to a permanent ceasefire would continue for months. A follow-up editorial on November 25, 2023, pontificated, in tortured prose, about the need for a long-term peace solution without any mention of the ceasefire necessary for one to manifest.[20] This was followed up two weeks later, in typical liberal imperialist duality, with an editorial arguing in favor of Congress shipping another $14.3 billion in weapons to Israel so it could continue leveling Gaza.[21] But don't worry, liberal readers. The *New York Times* editorial board insisted it only supported the record-breaking arms transfer because "Mr. Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken have urged Israel to reduce the number of civilian casualties, and administration officials have become more

forceful, in public statements and in private conversations with Israeli leaders." We now know these "urgings" had zero teeth and did not impact the death toll at all, and, as we laid out in Chapter 3, existed entirely for liberal public consumption. But the *New York Times* had to reconcile its high-minded liberal human rights brand with its support for modern history's most efficient child-killing machine, so vague, consequence-free finger-wagging would have to do.

It wasn't until February 2024, again following the cue of the Biden White House, that the *New York Times* vaguely called for a ceasefire, along similar lines that the White House did: a temporary pause for hostage exchanges while still supporting Israel's right to continue devastating Gaza after some aid would be let in and Israel had all of its captives returned.[22] As laid out in Chapter 3, the *New York Times*, like much of mainstream US media, adopted the administration's new, deliberately muddied definition of "ceasefire" that still supported Israel's nominal goal of "eliminating Hamas" while allowing for some sustained period of cessation of hostilities to temper the anti-war sentiment increasingly boiling up on the international stage and on US college campuses.

Even more slippery was the *Washington Post* editorial board, which published twelve editorials over the first six months, all of which supported the assault on Gaza but, like the *New York Times*, did so with a conspicuous Very Heavy Heart. After their initial rah-rah support on October 9[23] and October 12,[24] the *Washington Post*, like the *New York Times*, pivoted to a more lamenting tone as the Palestinian bodies began piling up. Skimming the headline of their October 17, 2023, editorial, "It would be a moral and strategic mistake to ignore Gaza's plight,"[25] one could be under the impression that this was a humanitarian intervention demanding an immediate and lasting ceasefire. One would be mistaken. The editorial, dripping with feigned concern for Palestinian suffering, never called for an end to the bombing and siege but parroted the White House's nonsensical position of supporting the bombing and siege of Gaza while calling for more "aid" to enter Gaza. This *Make Sure Palestinian Children Are Being Bombed on 600 Calorie a Day* line would be,

and remain for months, the Far-Left flank of acceptable liberal criticism of the conflict. Two weeks later, on November 5, 2023, The *Post* editorial board would make its full-throated commitment to Israel's genocidal war explicit: "The most that can prudently be pursued [by the White House] is a more limited approach, based on pauses in the fighting for humanitarian relief," the *Post* made clear.[26]

> A unilateral or unconditional cease-fire by Israel would be inconsistent with the country's right to defend itself against the authors of the massacre on Oct. 7: Hamas. To leave this Iranian-backed terrorist organization—a top official of which recently said the Oct. 7 attack could, and should, be repeated—intact and in charge of Gaza would be untenable, not only for Israel but also for the region.

To distance themselves from the manifest horrors streaming live on people's social media feeds, The Post, like the White House, continued to echo the increasingly tenuous *Make Sure Palestinian Children Are Being Bombed on 600 Calories A Day* position. "Hamas's culpability does not absolve Israel of responsibility to do everything it can to prevent civilian casualties and relieve Gaza's humanitarian crisis. That means doing more than it is doing at present, particularly concerning aid for the civilian population." Left unmentioned is that the *Make Sure Palestinian Children Are Being Bombed on 600 Calories A Day* position was, at the time, explicitly rejected by every major human rights and humanitarian group, from Amnesty International to Doctors Without Borders. Supporting the primary cause of their suffering—indiscriminate bombing and nonstop displacement—while advocating the facilitation of token aid was not a morally or intellectually serious position. "It makes no sense to briefly pause the war to allow in limited humanitarian aid," Doctors Without Borders wrote in a November 10, 2023, press release, "only to then resume the intense bombardment that is driving massive humanitarian needs."[27]

None of this would deter the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, which both stuck with their *Bomb Palestinian Children on*

600 Calories A Day position long into 2024, as they, like most liberal institutions, began slowly ceasing to defend, in explicit terms, the "war on Hamas" fiction. But they, like progressives Sen. Bernie Sanders and Sen. Elizabeth Warren opposing a lasting ceasefire in late 2023,[28] served their primary purpose: to police the left flank of Acceptable Opinion and permit Israel to change the "facts on the ground" such that a deliberate war of annihilation, a deliberate war of choice, could slowly merge into a settled reality, a quagmire to wring hands over, not something that could have been prevented in—what was obvious at the time—its genocidal nascence.[29]

HOW MANY DEAD CHILDREN WOULD BE OKAY?

Along with the *Make Sure Palestinian Children Are Being Bombed on 600 Calories A Day* position, the "too many civilian deaths" pseudo-criticism quickly became the Far-Left flank of pushback against Israel and the occasional White House official. It's how journalists—when they did decide to be somewhat adversarial—maintained the appearance of independence and fairness without running afoul of the dogmas of pro-Israel advocacy groups that routinely hounded, publicly shamed, and lobbied news executives, reporters, and editors. The underlying premise of this framing was that there was some acceptable level of Palestinian civilian deaths, and Israeli military commanders needed to be scolded by liberal US officials into not exceeding it.

The fundamental logic of the "war" could never be meaningfully challenged. Numerous military experts and Secretary of State Tony Blinken acknowledged Hamas could not be defeated militarily. (Blinken did so twice, once in January 2024 in a closed-door meeting with Netanyahu[30] and again publicly in January 2025.[31]) Yet the idea that "Hamas" was a traditional military enemy that could—and morally ought to be—defeated (but, perhaps, with slightly less civilian bloodshed) rather than a group that the Israelis ought to be negotiating a ceasefire with was an ideological axiom taken for granted by US media (as laid out in Chapter 1). That the conflict was fundamentally a political one, requiring a political resolution, was a

possibility never entertained by any mainstream pundit or reporter. The premise that Hamas was an ISIS-like "terrorist group" that must be defeated was taken for granted, and all debate followed from this highly contestable premise. What needed intervention, and *Deep Concern*, was the number of Palestinian women and children that needed to be snuffed out in order to attain this otherwise noble and achievable goal. This premise, it turned out, provided the perfect, open-ended pretext for years of killing, dispossession, and ethnic cleansing in Gaza.

What's notable is that the precise number of acceptable dead Palestinian children was never offered by any of the anchors, pundits, or reporters feigning this concerned posture. Presumably, they had one in mind, but it was never revealed, probably because doing so would expose the dehumanizing and cynical premise of the question. Imagine, if you will, a CNN anchor pinning down an interview with a Hamas commander and asking them if "too many civilians" had died on October 7 and what they were doing to reduce that number for future attacks. The assumption of good faith, the presumption of humanitarian aims—the image of a reluctant killer doing their best to surgically take out the Bad Guys—would not be a posture taken by any reporter. Palestinians, it is simply assumed, kill for sadistic glee. The US and its allies kill *With a Heavy Heart* and only because *They Have No Choice*. Any framing that muddied up this basic framework was out of bounds.

JAKE TAPPER AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SERIOUS NEWS MAN

No account of how US media created the ideological and political conditions for mass death in Gaza could be complete without detailing the role of CNN's Jake Tapper. In addition to hosting the aforementioned Sunday show, State of the Union, that iced out Palestinian voices entirely, he was the face of the weekday program *The Lead*, where Tapper and his cadre of reporters and correspondents wrapped up the day's key news stories. From this influential perch, Tapper was a major vector of pro-Israel disinformation, distortions

and demagoguery. Seen as the quintessential Serious Newsman, a "staunch defender of facts in the Trump era," the *New York Times* said about him in 2018, Tapper set the agenda not only at CNN, but cable news writ large. All the reason his frequent baseless accusations of antisemitism against Israel's critics, indifference—and sometimes open hostility—to Palestinian voices, constant platforming of pro-Israel guests, and innuendo-laden segments smearing Gaza protesters throughout the genocide were so consequential.

Repeatedly, Tapper promoted the canard that Palestinians wanted more dead Palestinians and their widespread death at the hands of Israel was actually part of a sinister Hamas strategy of Jihad that, somehow, forced Israel to kill as many civilians as possible in a callous effort to solicit global sympathy. This talking point, a long favorite of Israeli propagandists, achieved two things: 1) deflected blame from Israel who, as Tapper repeatedly insisted, were doing their best to avoid civilian deaths and 2) reduced Palestinians being killed en masse to a kind of an Arab pathology of self-destruction, inverting agency and creating a moral logic where Israel could not, by definition, kill an excess of civilians because every death was somehow Hamas' fault. He was asked by CNN's Oliver Darcy in November 2023 about critics who said "the news media, broadly speaking, has not been doing an adequate job showing the suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza." Tapper, per usual, immediately shifted the blame to "Hamas." "[Hamas does not] particularly care about the loss of life of Palestinian civilians," he responded, "and that they have spent money on tunnels for their own safety, that of Hamas fighters, and they consider it the responsibility of the United Nations to protect the Palestinian civilians." To the extent Tapper took issue with the spiraling body count, it was only insofar as it was causing a PR headache for Israel and the White House.[32]

In one particularly cynical segment from that same month that went viral on right-wing and pro-Israel social media, "How Hamas frames the civilian casualties of war in Gaza," Tapper placed the blame for the mounting death toll in Gaza squarely on Hamas and their supposedly nihilistic strategy of "human shielding," flippantly asking, "What exactly did Hamas think the Israeli military would do

in response to [October 7]?" Apparently, Israel can respond in any manner they wish, with any level of extreme violence, because—according to Tapper's logic, and his shifting line between reporting and editorial, between descriptive and normative statements—any level of mass killing was predictable, and, by implication, justified. What, one wonders, did Israel *expect* after it laid siege to Gaza for 16 years and killed over 500 children in their 2014 bombing campaign? Surely, any supposedly straight newsman making such a flippant comment after the October 7 attack would be fired and accused of justifying the killing of innocent people, but when Tapper does it as Palestinian deaths mount—with a death count ten times that of October 7 (that would go onto balloon to upwards of 100 times)—it's seen as a savvy, hard truth. After spending five straight minutes pinning the blame for every death in Gaza on Hamas, in typical form, Tapper ends his segment by attempting to point out some hypocrisy on the part of the ceasefire crowd. "They [the Israelis] hear all the calls for a ceasefire. What they do not hear is anyone in the international community proposing any way for them to get back their 240 hostages that Hamas kidnapped."

Except, ceasefire advocates, to say nothing of Amnesty International, Doctors Without Borders, and most human rights groups at the time, *had been* proposing a way for Israel to get its captives back, the offer Hamas had laid out from the beginning and a version of which, predictably, ended up being the manner in which they would return the remaining captives after two years of pointless mass death: a ceasefire where Israel stops bombing and starving Gaza in exchange for a return of their citizens. In another *The Lead* segment from December 9, 2023, "What ordinary Gazans think about Hamas," Tapper ratcheted up the smarm and misinformation to new heights, platforming Joseph Braude from the seemingly benign-sounding Center for Peace Communications, a Zionist advocacy group posing as a "peace" organization. The Center for Peace Communications' board of directors includes major pro-Israel funders as well as Dennis Ross, a long-time pro-Israel pundit and Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, itself a spin-off from AIPAC. (They also later co-published

news content with openly pro-Israel Free Press, run by Bari Weiss, with the backing of several pro-Israel donors.).

Braude, it's worth noting, also claimed to speak for unseen Iraqis when he wrote in support of the Iraq war in 2003 ("… too easily we overlook the most vital aspect of Iraq's reconstruction: the Iraqi people themselves," he lamented in his book at the time.). Braude's love for the "Iraqi people," like his supposed concern for "ordinary Gazans," was ultimately superficial, as he would go on in 2004 to plead guilty in federal court to illegally smuggling out Iraqi artifacts, namely 4,000-year-old marble and alabaster stone seals he knew to be stolen.[33]

None of Braude's shady connections or previous convictions would be noted by Tapper, of course. Nor would Center for Peace Communications' total lack of any connection to Palestinian civil society, either within Palestine or among the Palestinian diaspora. Nevertheless, Tapper would present the Center for Peace Communications as a reliable conduit of what Palestinians "actually think of Hamas." "Every day we see images of horrific suffering in Gaza," Tapper soberly tells his audience while showing a B-roll of mass suffering and bombed-out city blocks in Gaza. "What we don't usually hear is what Palestinians in Gaza actually think of Hamas."

Tapper then introduces Braude, who proceeds to play clips from his animated series *Whispered in Gaza*, allegedly relaying testimonials from Palestinians who oppose Hamas and either explicitly or implicitly want its overthrow in Gaza. "It's so important," a Deeply Concerned Tapper tells Braude, "for the world to hear those voices, Joseph." The sources for the "voices" in question are not identified—what Braude presents is not a video or audio recording of an actual person, but supposedly testimonies smuggled out of Gaza and read by voice actors, accompanied by animations. Tapper then cues up the showstopper, an alleged testimony of a "Gaza resident" from October 24, 2023, who, conveniently for Tapper and Braude, echoes every talking point of the Netanyahu administration.

> At this time, as a person living in the prison that is Gaza, my prime and immediate enemy is Hamas—not the [Israeli] occupa-

> tion. I have no house, no life, nothing. We're condemned to suffer because of this stupid organization. Who made us live in poverty in Gaza? Not the Jews—Hamas.

Tapper is quick to cover his bases, magnanimously conceding after playing this clip, "Now, I am sure there are also a lot of Gazans who are furious with Israel and hate the IDF," before pivoting back to the narrative that Gaza is effectively one large hostage situation with Hamas holding the Palestinians captive through terror and authoritarianism. And this is key to understanding Tapper's role. He doesn't operate in the murky waters of outright racism and the dehumanization of Palestinians. His role—and the role of much of the "Agenda-Setting" media—is to intervene with liberal audiences and assuage their concerns at moments of moral and political unease. As the body count piled up, the military campaign dragged on, and the revenge narrative began to lose moral purchase, the moral goal posts shifted to an incidental war of liberation. *Don't worry*, Tapper implies, *by bombing Gaza, Israel seeks to liberate an oppressed people from their "prime and immediate enemy" Hamas.*

This isn't to say there aren't actual voices in Palestine who oppose Hamas—clearly, all societies are heterogenous, and Gaza is no exception. But examining these nuances wasn't Tapper's goal, doubly so while bombs were shredding children in Gaza in real time, day in and day out, under the thin moral auspices of "eliminating Hamas." It didn't matter to Tapper, or to his producers at CNN, that the whole project was clearly haphazard Israeli PR. Nor is it worth mentioning that it was backed by pro-Israel donors, and those involved had no relationship to Palestinian political society. Nor was there any attempt to quantify this "Blame Hamas First" position within Gaza's population, something, as noted before, very much intelligible via polling both before and after October 7. What mattered was intervening right when support for the "war on Hamas" began fading and grasping for other superficially appealing liberal justifications for the nonstop carnage, no matter how thin or short-lived the pretense.

Tapper's pro-Israel bias was so apparent, it became a point of tension within the network. As the *Guardian*'s Chris McGreal reported in February 2024,[34] one CNN source "picked out anchor Jake Tapper's programme as an example of an anchor too closely identifying with one side while the other gets only a restricted look in."

In addition to constantly shifting blame for Israeli killing onto anyone other than Israel, Tapper made a habit of either explicitly saying, or more often the case, coyly implying that Israel's critics were motivated by antisemitism. The sleaziest example being one September 2024 episode where Tapper and his colleague Dana Bash accused the lone Palestinian-American in Congress, Rashida Tlaib, of antisemitism because, in an interview with the *Detroit Metro Times*, she accused Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel of bias against Palestinian protesters that she was prosecuting—a claim later vindicated after Nessel was forced to drop the charges over perceptions of bias. In making her criticism, Tlaib never brought up Nessel's ethnicity or religion, but this didn't stop Tapper and Bash from simply lying and saying she did.[35]

In an interview with Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, a week after Tlaib's comments, Tapper didn't even bother with "some say" weasel accusations, choosing instead to outright lie and claim Tlaib implied something she did not. "Congresswoman Tlaib is suggesting that she shouldn't be prosecuting these individuals that Nessel says broke the law and that she's only doing it because she's Jewish," Tapper said to the governor. Whitmer deflected the question, but the damage was done. The next day, Bash doubled down on her own show, playing a clip from Tapper's segment. Bash said that Tlaib accused "the state's Jewish attorney general" of "letting her religion influence her job." Bash then added, in mopey tones, it was a "sad reality" that "antisemitism is everywhere and it comes from both ends of the political spectrum."

The *Detroit Metro Times* reporter Steve Neavling, who conducted the original interview with Tlaib, harshly criticized Tapper and Bash.[36] "I'm the reporter who interviewed Rashida Tlaib," he said on social media. "She never said Nessel did this because she's Jewish. Never. You're spreading lies." After backlash from media watchdogs

and Arab and Muslim advocacy groups, Bash and Tapper would go on to vaguely walk it back. They did not apologize to Tlaib or have her on to defend herself, but Tapper said in a throw-away comment at the end of an episode days later that he had "misspoke." Bash then clarified that "Tlaib did not reference Nessel's Jewish identity" but followed this up by insisting "Nessel still says she believes it's antisemitic." There were, of course, no consequences for this smear, no public acknowledgment by CNN that they had libeled the most prominent Palestinian-American in the country. They simply accused an Israel critic of antisemitism based on nothing but racist innuendo, smeared their name under the guise of Just Asking Hard Questions, then moved on.

Morning Joe

Our study shows the most aggressively anti-Palestinian show on MSNBC, and perhaps cable news in general, was *Morning Joe*. As Branko Marcetic at *Jacobin* detailed in his own study of the first six months of *Morning Joe*'s Gaza coverage post-October 7,[37] the daily morning gab program featured a nonstop torrent of breathless, one-dimensional, pro-Israel messaging.

Morning Joe's one-sided coverage was even more stark than the Sunday shows or editorial boards. From October 2023 to October 2024, the *Morning Joe* program did not feature a single Palestinian guest despite platforming, uncritically and fawningly, dozens of Israeli officials and pro-Israel commentators. *Morning Joe*'s use of emotive words was even more one-sided than the Sunday shows. In a study of the first six months of their coverage post-October 7, the word "massacre" was used 81 times on *Morning Joe* to describe violence against Israelis and zero times for Palestinians. The word "barbaric" was used 22 times to describe the killing of Israelis and zero times for Palestinians. The word "savage" was used 38 times to describe the killing of Israelis and zero times for Palestinians. The word "slaughter" was used 119 times to describe violence against Israelis and only once for Palestinians—when, on February 5, 2024, NBC News political analyst Elise Jordan asked the panel,[38] "What is our strategy [Biden] is giving Israel? We provide 15 percent of their

defense budget in a normal year, yet we're using none of that leverage with what's happening in Gaza, with the slaughter of children and innocents," before catching herself and immediately following up with "I'm all for—I think Israel deserved to have a robust response to kill Hamas."

Morning Joe stood out as uniquely incendiary and heavy on incitement, with its panelists often throwing out the most lurid, evidence-free claims they could conjure up. Indeed, Joe Scarborough himself, in one of his many heated pro-Israel rants, repeated the "beheaded babies hoax" long after it had been debunked by mainstream media, telling panelist Mike Barnicle on October 25, 2023,

> I'm curious why people in the United States and across Europe and across the world think the Israelis should sit back, say, "Oh, okay, yeah," a ceasefire. Okay, yeah, let's let the people who raped our women, who shot our babies, **who beheaded our infants**, **our toddlers**, who massacred parents while their children watched, who massacred children while their parents watched, we should just sit back and see what happens.[39]

Morning Joe super-fan President Biden did not need the program to codify his hardened pro-Israel worldview. But it did arm him and his aides with their talking points for the day, and helped further shield—even if not by design—those making life-and-death decisions from the true horrors emerging out of Gaza. *Morning Joe* routinely featured Israeli military officials and pro-Israel pundits stateside, lobbing them softball questions and reinforcing every pro-Israel talking point. "Could you just, for Americans that are watching, "who will see strikes against buildings in Gaza," a concerned Scarborough mugged for his audience while interviewing IDF spokesperson Doron Spielman on October 12, 2023, "can you explain what those targets are that you're striking out against, and can you also explain what Israel is doing to minimize civilian casualties while trying to degrade and destroy the Hamas terror network?"[40]

The ADL's Jonathan Greenblatt was a constant presence on *Morning Joe*, always without any pushback—even after he insulted

Scarborough's colleagues. In response to MSNBC providing measured context for the October 7 attack, as described in Chapter 1, Greenblatt went on *Morning Joe* on October 9, 2023 and asked, "Who's writing the scripts? Hamas?"[41] After this insult, Greenblatt would go on to appear several more times on the show that year—as well as other MSNBC programs.

Scarborough's editorializing in support of Israel's bombing and siege of Gaza was conspicuous and openly discussed on his show, as Marcetic noted in his analysis. "There are those of us who have loved Israel, who've defended Israel, who have fought about Israel, who still love Israel, who actually went to battle with their fathers-in-law on national television over Israel and would do it again … who will always fight for Israel," he told audiences in one April 4, 2024, monologue.[42]

Talking to sources who worked at MSNBC in the aftermath of October 7, it was clear that, to the extent there were seemingly ideologically neutral rules against veering too far into editorializing the conflict, this was a prohibition only enforced in one direction.

"[Joe Scarborough] was not bound by that," said one former MSNBC journalist, referring to demands from Standards that they not express explicit opinions on the conflict. "*Morning Joe* did opinion throughout. There are special exceptions at the network, where nothing applies to them … at MSNBC, the rules don't apply to Joe Scarborough." This asymmetry of editorial standards would be a key feature of how ideological disciplining manifest in US media as it grappled with how to take a side while maintaining the appearance it wasn't: ostensibly ideologically neutral rules would be aggressively enforced against those sympathetic to Palestine and completely ignored for those spouting the White House and Israel's line—a dynamic we will lay out in more detail in Chapter 7.

7

Selective empathy and liberalism's crisis of legitimacy

A recurring theme we heard from media sources, and one evident in reporting on internal newsroom decisions and public statements, was that the double standard for Palestine extended beyond its dehumanization in media output. It also applied to how reporters and editors were disciplined and policed for their outward political positions on Gaza. Throughout media newsrooms, within press associations and universities, and among adjacent liberal nonprofits, new standards against violating "impartiality" or "neutrality" were invented post-October 7, seemingly overnight—selectively invoked, cynically wielded, and racially enforced. In response to the Black Lives Matter movement and the George Floyd protests, media outlets, cultural nonprofits, and colleges issued lofty—if vague—statements of support for racial justice. We saw similar moments of support for queer justice, environmental justice, and, as we will detail, the people of Ukraine after Russia's February 2022 invasion. But in the wake of October 7, this trend quickly reversed, as these same entities suddenly found both their tongues and hands tied on the subject of social justice as the death toll in Gaza skyrocketed in late 2023.

One obviously never wants to compare war crimes. But, as discussed in Chapter 2, the close proximity between Israel's attack on Gaza and Russia's invasion of Ukraine allows us to use the two conflicts as an A–B test in selective sympathy, inconsistent solidarity, and manifest double standards in reporting and internal guidelines of "neutrality." With this in mind, let us begin by comparing media coverage of traditionally sympathetic victims in both conflicts, then

let us examine the outward-facing responses of these media outlets and the broader liberal nonprofit and academic world.

SYMPATHETIC VICTIMS LIKE JOURNALISTS, REFUGEES, AND CHILDREN ARE MENTIONED MORE IN UKRAINE THAN IN GAZA, DESPITE A SIGNIFICANTLY WIDER GAP IN CASUALTIES AND HUMAN SUFFERING

Victims of Israel's attack on Gaza who could be expected to elicit sympathy from audiences—like journalists, refugees, and children—received little coverage during the first 100 days of Israel's assault, compared to their counterparts in Ukraine. This imbalance is especially severe given the scale of Palestinian suffering.

In the first 100 days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, 262 children were killed. In the first 100 days of Israel's assault on Gaza, more than 10,000 children were killed (the true number is likely much higher). But mentions of child deaths and related terms were 33.4 percent higher for Ukraine than for Gaza—4,223 versus 3,632. During this time frame, CNN mentioned child victims of the war 2,446 times for Ukraine versus 2,110 times for Gaza, and MSNBC mentioned child victims of the Ukraine war 1,775 times versus 1,522 times for Gaza. This means that, for each child death in Ukraine, children received the equivalent of 16.1 mentions on-air, whereas children in Gaza received the equivalent of 0.36 mentions.[1]

In that period, 77 journalists were killed in Gaza versus eight in the first 100 days of Russia's invasion. Yet, despite this huge disparity, deaths of media workers in Ukraine were given roughly equal mention, the analysis found: 196 mentions versus 198 mentions of Gaza journalists. This means that each journalist death in Gaza received the equivalent of 2.5 mentions, whereas each journalist death in Ukraine received the equivalent of 24 mentions.

Efforts by Israel to militarize or stigmatize Palestinians journalists—and thus justify their killings—were ignored altogether by mainstream US media, and IDF claims that they were "Hamas-linked" or "Hamas-affiliated" were mindlessly repeated by outlets like the *New York Times* and CNN, typically centered at the top of

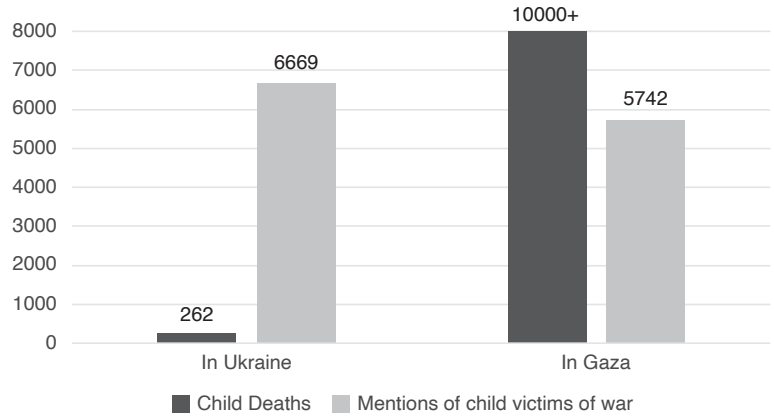

Figure 7.1 Mentions of child casualties and victims in Ukraine and Gaza during the first 100 days of their respective conflicts alongside casualty numbers on CNN and MSNBC (combined).

the articles, dulling any outrage that would otherwise stem from the repeated, nonstop targeting of reporters in Gaza. According to reporting from *+972 Magazine* and *Local Call* published in August of 2025,[2] the Israeli military had a special unit called the "legitimization cell" that is "tasked with gathering intelligence from Gaza that can bolster Israel's image in the international media." Journalist Yuval Abraham reports that one thing this cell does is "identify Gaza-based journalists it could portray as undercover Hamas operatives, in an effort to blunt growing global outrage over Israel's killing of reporters." Citing three anonymous intelligence sources, Abraham writes that the cell is concerned about the declining image of Israel across the world, and so is focusing its efforts on delegitimizing those documenting atrocities. "If the global media is talking about Israel killing innocent journalists, then immediately there's a push to find one journalist who might not be so innocent—as if that somehow makes killing the other 20 acceptable," one source told Abraham.

Despite the obvious incentive for Israel to smear any reporters they killed as "terrorists," this dynamic was ignored or downplayed, and reporters killed in Gaza were routinely framed as having been killed "by accident" or were, entirely on the say-so of Israeli claims, "Hamas."

Shifting our focus to cable news, MSNBC did not run a single segment in the first 100 days that focused specifically and exclusively on the plight of children in Gaza. (Joy-Ann Reid did run a segment on October 25 on civilian deaths with Hani Almadhoun and Daniel Levy that mentioned child deaths a handful of times.)[3] MSNBC ran over a dozen segments focusing specifically on the plight of Ukrainian children during the first 100 days of that conflict.

Humanizing coverage of refugees was entirely asymmetrical as well. A much greater percentage of the population in Gaza was displaced or turned into refugees (33 percent versus 80 percent). Yet, Ukrainians were described as refugees, displaced, or related terms eight times more often than Palestinians (1,663 versus 211). MSNBC aired several longer-form, sympathetic profile segments on Ukrainian refugees while running no such long-form segments exclusively on Palestinians displaced in and from Gaza.

CNN AND MSNBC COVERED THE IMPACT OF RUSSIA'S INVASION ON CIVILIANS TWICE AS OFTEN AS THEY DID THE IMPACT OF ISRAEL'S BOMBING AND SIEGE OF GAZA ON CIVILIANS, DESPITE THE LATTER HAVING A DEATH TOLL FIVE TIMES THAT OF THE FORMER

In the first 100 days of the respective conflicts, CNN and MSNBC covered Ukrainian civilians suffering almost twice as often as they covered that in Gaza, despite the latter's having a civilian death toll, during the allotted time frame, 500 percent greater than the former.

CNN anchors, reporters, and on-air guests mentioned Ukrainian civilians 15,593 times from February 24, 2022, to June 4, 2022. In contrast, they mentioned civilians in Gaza 7,569 times from October 7, 2023, to January 14, 2024. MSNBC anchors, reporters, and on-air guests mentioned Ukrainian civilians 13,941 times versus 7,493 mentions of civilians in Gaza.

The discrepancy was evident in primetime coverage on MSNBC, namely from highly influential, agenda-setting shows such as *The Rachel Maddow Show*, *The Last Word* with Lawrence O'Donnell, and *Deadline: White House* with host Nicolle Wallace. Maddow and

her guests mentioned Ukrainian civilians 3.4 times more than civilians in Gaza, O'Donnell and his guests 2.3 times more, and Wallace and her guests 3.2 times more. *All In* host Chris Hayes was a little better, but still showed a discrepancy: He and his guests mentioned Ukrainian civilians 1.8 times more than civilians in Gaza.

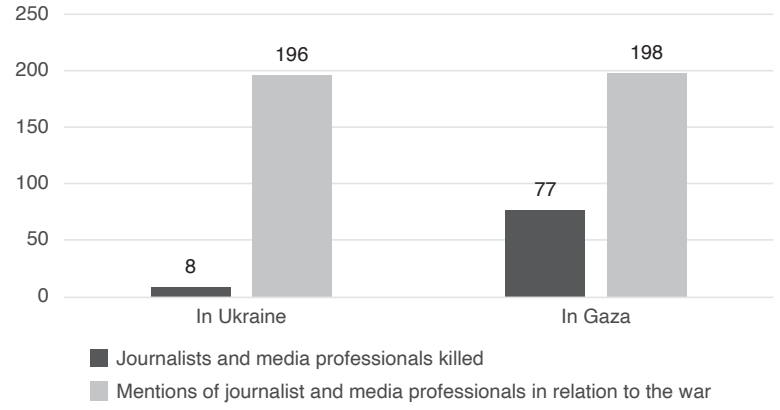

Figure 7.2 Mentions of journalists and media professional casualties and victims in Ukraine and Gaza during the first 100 days of their respective conflicts alongside casualty numbers on CNN and MSNBC (combined).

In fact, for seven of the first twelve weeks of the Gaza assault, Maddow didn't mention Palestinians at all on her once-a-week show.

Jonathan Capehart's *The Sunday Show* tied Maddow for the biggest discrepancy of any MSNBC or CNN show, mentioning Ukrainian civilians 739 times versus 218 times for civilians in Gaza (3.4 times). Other popular shows had similarly wide discrepancies: *Way Too Early With Jonathan Lemire* (3 times), *Alex Witt Reports* (2.6 times), *The 11th Hour With Stephanie Ruhle* (2.3 times), and *Velshi* with Ali Velshi (1.9 times).

CNN's coverage of Palestinian civilians had slightly more parity, but was still generally 1.5 to 2 times. *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer* mentioned Ukrainian civilians 2 times more than those in Gaza, as did *CNN Newsroom Live* and *Erin Burnett OutFront*. *The*

Lead with Jake Tapper had a ratio of 1.8 times, as did *Anderson Cooper 360*.

Three notable exceptions were *The ReidOut with Joy-Ann Reid* (1.4 times), *Ayman with Ayman Mohyeldin* (1.1 times), and *Fareed Zakaria GPS* (1.1 times), which all gave closer to equal weight to the civilian deaths in Gaza and Ukraine and, qualitatively, had much deeper, humanizing coverage of Palestinian suffering in Gaza. *The Mehdi Hasan Show* could not be accurately analyzed because it was canceled by MSNBC about six weeks into the Gaza siege and bombing, following reports of post-October 7 anti-Muslim bias at the network.[4]

It's important to note that a significant portion of these mentions of Palestinian civilian deaths were perfunctory and brief, and often prefaced with the vaguely discrediting qualifier "according to Hamas-run/Hamas-controlled health officials." As mentioned in Chapter 2, in our 100-day survey period, CNN used the "Hamas-run" label 247 times and MSNBC used it 137 times.

ON CNN AND MSNBC, THE WORDS "WAR CRIME" OR "GENOCIDE" WERE MENTIONED OVER 17 TIMES MORE IN THE CONTEXT OF UKRAINE THAN THEY WERE IN THE CONTEXT OF GAZA

Even though the destruction of Gaza, by all objective metrics, has been magnitudes more brutal and deadly than that of Russia's invasion and occupation of Ukraine, the totalizing moral labels of "war crime" and "genocide" were used on CNN and MSNBC 17.2 times more often in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine than Israel's action in Gaza.

A review of the first 30 days of CNN and MSNBC coverage of the respective conflicts reveals that Ukrainian victims were said—on-air, by anchors, guests, or reporters—to be subject to genocide or war crimes a total of 1,790 times (1,515 for war crimes and 275 for genocide). This compared to 104 times when the victim in question was Palestinian (92 for war crimes and twelve for genocide).

During our survey period, CNN anchors, guests, or reporters referred to Palestinian victims as subject to "genocide" five times and "war crimes" 57 times. CNN anchors, guests, or reporters referred to Ukrainians as subject to genocide 157 times and "war crimes" 774 times.

MSNBC anchors, guests, or reporters referred to Palestinian victims as subject to "genocide" seven times and "war crimes" 35 times. MSNBC anchors, guests, or reporters referred to Ukrainians as subject to "genocide" 118 times and "war crimes" 741 times.

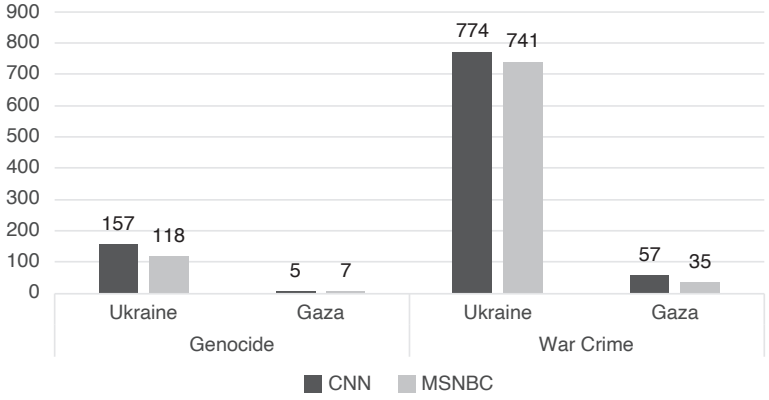

Figure 7.3 Mentions of terms "war crime" and "genocide" in the context of Gaza and Ukraine in the first 30 days of their respective conflicts.

Ostensibly non-opinionated reporters and "analysts" on both MSNBC and CNN often asserted, as a matter of fact, that Russia was committing war crimes against Ukrainians, without this being seen as violating their neutrality. There are no examples of their doing so when describing Israeli war crimes.[5] In one particularly ironic example, *Andrea Mitchell Reports* guest Jeh Johnson, who was simply introduced as "former Homeland Security Secretary and Pentagon official," flatly asserted that Russia was committing war crimes.[6] What MSNBC didn't disclose is that Johnson was, at the time, on the board of directors of Lockheed Martin, which would

go on to provide Israel the fighter jets and bombs they were using to kill Palestinians by the hundreds a day.

DOUBLE STANDARDS AND NAKED HYPOCRISY OF LIBERAL JOURNALIST INSTITUTIONS AND THE BROADER NONPROFIT AND ACADEMIC WORLD

The double standard extended beyond moralizing coverage and focus on sympathetic victims—into how media workers were policed, disciplined, and marginalized, often in subtly racist ways. The network news staffer we met in Chapter 2, who came into work on Monday, October 9, 2023, only to find that all of his expert guests, some Palestinian or Arab, had all been replaced by spokespeople for Israel, recounts how quickly informal racist policies determined who could and could not be perceived as unbiased.

> Some of the other staffers who worked on Sunday basically told me that the EP [executive producer] had put together that I was Arab and said that I couldn't be trusted, and so my guests had to be canceled, because I was accused of bias before any of the people said anything.

"It is the definition of ethnic discrimination," he told me over the phone.

This experience underscores that the US media's dehumanization of Palestinians in Gaza is frequently enforced by labor policies that discipline workers who are deemed to be out of line. Media outlets, after all, are workplaces too, and ideological parameters are enforced by ensuring that workers who are too sympathetic, provide too much context, speak out in defense of Palestinians on social media, or are simply the wrong ethnicity, are kept in check—or even pushed out. This is accomplished by outright ethnic discrimination, as well as more subtle methods of icing out workers who say the wrong things or are the wrong kinds of people. And as we have seen increasingly since October 2023, this is also achieved through aggressive campaigns to dox workers and get them fired.

While doxxing campaigns predate October 7, 2023, "it's been exponentially larger since then," Alek Felstiner, a labor lawyer, told *Workday Magazine* and *The Nation* in November of 2024.[7] He added, "I've been in the Palestine Legal referral network for at least five years, and the volume now is 10 times. It's a completely different order of magnitude, and that's only people who were in a position where they were able to contact the organization for help."

Felstiner told me in June 2025 that "social media campaigns will take issue with something that somebody said on social media or wrote and make it their goal to try to pressure the employer into firing the employee. A big chunk of those are people whose employers would not have any knowledge of or reason to take any kind of action, except that these organizations specifically target and try to pressure them."

It is difficult to know exactly how widespread this retaliation is throughout US media, but anecdotally, everyone we talked to in the industry said it is pervasive. When reaching out to journalists, there is palpable fear. Most of the Center-Left publications named in this book have unions representing a portion of their staff, and while this offers a layer of protection, it does not, ultimately, guarantee against the many insidious forms of retaliation and discrimination. This climate is in keeping with an uptick in retaliation against workers across industries, from K–12 teachers to higher education to baristas to healthcare workers.

Some have tried to document this trend. In May of 2024, the National Writers Union published a report[8] detailing retaliation in the media industry, by tracking "44 cases of retaliation that impacted more than 100 media workers." They found that, since October 7, "leaders of Western media companies and cultural institutions have acted to suppress the speech of media workers who seek to elevate Palestinian voices or express concern about Israel's human rights violations." The National Writers Union represents freelancers, who are often the most vulnerable and precarious workers at a company.

Retaliation can take many forms. Assignments have been revoked, or workers have been restricted from covering a certain topic. Appearances were canceled and awards rescinded. Some

workers were pushed to resign, and others were fired. The cases were compiled by reports in the news and social media, as well as conversations and surveys of affected people.

The report found that writers who identified themselves as people of color were disproportionately impacted, accounting for 76 percent of all alleged cases. And more than a third of the people targeted by alleged retaliation were Muslim or of Middle Eastern or North African descent.

Another 2025 study[9] by the Arab and Middle Eastern Journalist Association, a nonprofit organization for media professionals of Arab and Middle Eastern descent, surveyed about 70 journalists "working across the United States and beyond." It found that "reporters of MENA [Middle Eastern and North African] descent [were] asked to prove their neutrality more than their peers, their identities are treated as implied biases, they are discouraged from covering stories tied to their communities, and they receive little institutional support."

Of those surveyed, 68 percent said that, after October 7, editors made changes to how they "assign, frame, or edit coverage of MENA communities." 85 percent said their reporting on the MENA region "has been held to a higher standard of neutrality" than their non-Arab and Middle Eastern colleagues, and 75 percent said newsroom expectations of objectivity are applied unevenly "depending on background or identity." Of the survey respondents, 68 percent said their "impartiality has been questioned explicitly because of their ethnicity or religion, 75 percent said they've "had to self-censor because of fear of backlash," and 44 percent reported an uptick of online harassment since October 7.

There are numerous indicators, meanwhile, that overall retaliation against workers who express solidarity with Palestinians is up, too, which is almost certainly reflected in media workplaces. In May of 2024, Palestine Legal published a report that determined "the wave of politically motivated repression in the workplace has been the most severe in the country since at least the Vietnam War." From October 2023 to December 2023 alone, the legal aid organization received 383 reports that "involved employment concerns, includ-

ing 124 individuals who had already been terminated from their positions," the report states. That number has only increased since.[10]

The Council on American–Islamic Relations (CAIR) released a civil rights report, which said that in 2023, the group received 1,201 complaints about employment discrimination related to Islamophobia.[11] According to Farah Afify,[12] then-research and advocacy coordinator for CAIR, this was a 113 percent increase over 2022, and complaints included alleged instances "where employees are sharing something in support of Palestine, either at work or on social media, and facing disciplinary measures as a result."

Often, such discrimination takes the form of selective enforcement of ostensibly ideological and race-neutral policies. Janette, a pseudonym, works for a publication that has a reputation for progressive-leaning and accurate investigative journalism. This journalist is still working for the outlet, so did not want to be identifiable, concerned about retaliation or broader professional consequences. That means I can't say much about the specifics of what she allegedly faced at work, but I can discuss the broader themes.

Janette studied journalism in college and was always interested in trying to reach as wide an audience as possible. She avoided the kind of public presence that boxes journalists into a corner of fringe or activist, took seriously ideals like fairness, and thought deeply about the ethical implications of language. When she applied to her current job, she recalls, "I put in my application essay that I'm so excited to apply for a place that is centering humanity and talking about the people that are wrapped up in the issues, and not just the issues, but centering people."

Before October 7, 2023, she explains, "I had very good relationships with everyone. I was just feeling, like, really comfortable. I felt like I had a modicum of respect." Our source is Muslim, has spent time reporting from the Middle East, and up until that time had spoken openly with coworkers about the need to recognize the humanity of people in that region, and be wary about dehumanizing terms like "terrorists."

But then October 7 happened, and "it was strangely silent," she says. A workplace that usually talked vociferously about world

events had nothing to say. "It felt like, okay, this subject is taboo, and it sent a signal. I felt like I'm in this, up until then, family. We're so close and we can talk about anything. But this showed, no, we're not really."

A few weeks later, our source did what could only be described as moderate posting on social media about the dire conditions people in Gaza were being forced to endure, and appealed for high journalistic standards when covering the issue. I can't say more about the specifics, but suffice to say that this individual's posts were thoroughly reasonable, and didn't come close to crossing any line.

Here's what I can share about what happened next: my source's employers found out about her posts, and she was slowly iced out of any coverage on the issue. She was targeted not only for her editorial positions on what constitutes fair coverage of Israel's assault on Gaza, but also for her own identity as a Muslim. And the retaliation was subtle—always invoking procedures, cloaked in HR-speak, never overt. No one ever said, "We don't want Muslims to talk or write about Palestine," she said. It was overwhelming, relentless, and incredibly polite. It was retaliation by two-on-one meetings with management, and also through silence, or messages relayed from one manager to another. Whereas my source had previously been praised for thinking critically about how to use humanizing language to cover difficult social issues, her inquiries about humanizing language when discussing Palestinians were suddenly depicted as a threat to journalistic objectivity and integrity.

"Now I'm at the point where I cannot wait to be a recovering journalist," Janette says. "I do not want to work in this industry, not in the West."

Janette faced moral injury as a result, she says. "There's all these other consequences of not being able to speak the truth, of not being able to speak up about crimes against humanity," she underscores. "It means being against all of humanity. It's not just happening to the people in Palestine. It's happening against us. That's why it's called a crime against humanity. And then I feel like a crazy person, because I'm one of the few people that is like, 'This isn't normal. How are we going on? How is just everything going on?'"

This experience has been crushing for Janette. She took a month off for her health, and when we talked to her, she said, "I'm literally in intensive outpatient therapy right now, every day for three hours." She recently struggled with suicidal ideations—this may sound extreme, but we've heard this specifically with other Muslim-American journalists we interviewed on this topic as well.

Often, discrimination comes in the form of excluding certain voices. "What a Palestinian guest was able to say, versus what an Israeli guest was able to say on-air, are two completely different lines in terms of what's okay," the network staffer source told us.

> It was something that I raised with standards at [my media outlet] a couple of times back in the early days. I would basically have a Palestinian guest say something to the effect of, "You know, this didn't happen overnight, blah, blah, blah, they're killing us, and so on. This is tantamount to a genocide."
>
> And [the network bosses] were like, "This isn't the conversation that we're trying to have. This isn't the tone that we want to have on [this network]. Sorry, this isn't the tone that we want to have. These aren't the conversations that we're looking for." And then they would have on Israeli guests that would basically say, "We should kill babies." And one interview got flagged, and the other didn't.

It is near-impossible to quantify the full extent of racial and ethnic discrimination in the aftermath of the October 7 attacks; journalists are well aware that even speaking out on these issues can cost them their jobs, and many have remained mum. But there are some troubling indicators, particularly at the *New York Times*. In March of 2024, the union that represents workers for the *New York Times* wrote a letter to management accusing them of discriminating against and targeting workers who are of Middle Eastern or North African descent during the course of their internal investigation into newsroom leaks.[13] The weeks-long *New York Times*' investigation followed a report by the *Intercept* that the *New York Times* had pulled an episode of *The Daily* podcast about alleged sexual violence

perpetrated by Hamas "amid a furious internal debate about the strength of the paper's original reporting on the subject." *Intercept* reporters Daniel Boguslaw and Ryan Grim cited "*Times* newsroom sources" in their piece.[14]

Washington Post reporter Laura Wagner obtained a letter from Susan DeCarava, the president of News Guild of New York, charging that those workers who were met with "particularly hostile questioning" were "targeted for their national origin, ethnicity and race." The letter says, "We demand that the *New York Times* cease what has become a destructive and racially targeted witch hunt."

According to Wagner's reporting,

> In a separate statement sent late Friday to Guild members, union leaders said *Times* managers had questioned employees about their involvement in an affinity group for employees of Middle Eastern and North African heritage and "ordered them to hand over the names of all of the … active members, and demanded copies of private text-message conversations between colleagues about their shared workplace concerns." (Top editors denied the accusations of racial targeting.)

Sometimes the firings are overt retaliation for acknowledging the suffering of Palestinians. On October 13, 2023, the *Onion*, a satirical publication, ran an article with the headline, "Dying Gazans Criticized For Not Using Last Words To Condemn Hamas."[15] Michael Eisen, then the editor-in-chief of *eLife*, an academic journal, quoted the headline on Twitter/X, and wrote, "The Onion speaks with more courage, insight and moral clarity than the leaders of every academic institution put together. I wish there were a @TheOnion university."[16]

The next day, October 14, he wrote on Twitter/X,

> Every sane person on Earth is horrified and traumatized by what Hamas did and wants it to never happen again. All the more so as a Jew with Israeli family. But I am also horrified by the collective

> punishment already being meted out on Gazans, and the worse that is about to come.[17]

On October 24, 2023, *eLife*'s board of directors announced that it would be firing Eisen. "Mike has been given clear feedback from the board that his approach to leadership, communication and social media has at key times been detrimental to the cohesion of the community we are trying to build and hence to *eLife*'s mission," the board said in a statement distributed to the press. "It is against this background that a further incidence of this behavior has contributed to the board's decision."[18]

While the statement didn't specifically mention his tweets on October 13 and 14, this is how Eisen described his firing on Twitter/X: "I have been informed that I am being replaced as the editor-in-chief of @eLife for retweeting a @TheOnion piece that calls out indifference to the lives of Palestinian civilians."[19]

Eisen was not alone. For six years, David Velasco was the editor of *Artforum*, a magazine about contemporary art. But then on October 19, 2023, under his leadership, *Artforum* published an open letter signed by thousands of artists, academics, and curators calling for solidarity with Palestinians and for a ceasefire. In response, Martin Eisenberg, a prominent collector who inherited the Bed Bath & Beyond fortune, "began contacting famous art world figures on the list whose work he had championed to express his objections to the letter," Daniel Boguslaw and Natasha Lennard reported for the *Intercept*.[20]

Just one week after the letter was published (and then denounced in Artforum in a separate letter),[21] Velasco was called into a meeting with Jay Penske, the CEO of Artforum's parent company, according to the *Intercept*, which cites three sources. By the end of the day, he had been fired. "I have no regrets," Velasco told the *New York Times* of the incident. "I'm disappointed that a magazine that has always stood for freedom of speech and the voices of artists has bent to outside pressure."[22]

Joy-Ann Reid, who, as we noted above, was one of the few voices in cable news to engage in bare minimum humanization of Palestin-

ians, was abruptly fired from MSNBC in February 2025 due, in part, to her coverage of Gaza, according to Reid. She told the *Breakfast Club* radio show in June 2025 that, despite her show doing well in the ratings, she was let go because you "just can't get away from the fact that talking about Gaza in a way that humanizes Palestinians is not the usual way that cable news operates, or that any news in this country operates for whatever reason, that topic makes people uncomfortable."[23]

This chilling effect and institutional cowardice was pervasive throughout even in the most "progressive" newsrooms. As Laura Albast documented for *Prism* in September 2025[24] in her thorough study of media bias in US newsrooms, openly pro-Labor outlets like More Perfect Union silenced staffers who wanted to intervene on the issue of genocide in Gaza, even when the pitch had an explicit labor angle. Citing the accounts of an anonymous staff member she calls "Spencer," Albast documents how workers "were told that the newsroom lacked the necessary expertise for such coverage, and that their focus was US-based, not international" (despite the fact, as the staffer notes, they had done segments on labor in Sweden around that same time frame).[25] Albast goes on to detail a battle between lower-level staffers and management who were allegedly told by the executive director of More Perfect Union, Faiz Shakir to avoid the subject of Gaza, even when it directly overlapped with major union actions like American Postal Workers Union calls for a ceasefire on November 8, 2023 or the United Auto Workers doing so on December 1, 2023.

"I think Faiz was pretty clear that he's not currently interested in us covering labor activism for a ceasefire," read, according to Prism, one screenshot from management directed to after a staffer highlighted the news of the American Postal Workers Union backing a ceasefire in an internal Slack channel dedicated to social media ideas.

Eventually, after upward pressure, mostly from interns, management permitted vague mention of Labor's support for a ceasefire. On December 1, after the United Auto Workers (UAW) released a statement calling for a ceasefire in Gaza,[26] Albast reported that the staff

received permission to cover the story. But, according to Albast's source "in the end, it turned out management approved language that did not mention a ceasefire or Gaza at all." That January, Shakir launched a bid for chair of the Democratic National Convention, which he lost.

The soft censorship of More Perfect Union is notable because there were other labor publications at the time that covered Gaza as the major US labor story that it was. Publications like *In These Times*[27] and *Labor Notes*[28] tracked the efforts of rank-and-file union members, and some labor leaders, to pass ceasefire resolutions early on, eventually leading to a July 2024 statement by US unions representing almost half of all unionized US workers demanding a halt to arms shipments to Israel.[29] Since October 7, 2023, union members have organized and struggled to push their leadership, pass resolutions, and even revoke presidential endorsements over Gaza. Even if More Perfect Union's scope was "not international," US Labor's conspicuous and repeated advocacy for a ceasefire, albeit often belatedly, was clearly a domestic labor story, and other labor publications treated it as such.

Ultimately, harsh retaliations against writers speaking out against the increasingly obvious fact of genocide were central to snuffing out broader movements for a ceasefire. In late fall/early winter of 2023, the *LA Times* retaliated against its journalists for signing onto an open letter condemning Israel's killing of Palestinian journalists in Gaza and urging "integrity in Western media coverage of Israel's atrocities against Palestinians." The publication said that 38 journalists who signed the letter were banned from covering Gaza for at least three months. Elmahrek was among those who faced consequences.[30]

The letter, which was signed by 1,484 verified media workers, states, "As reporters, editors, photographers, producers, and other workers in newsrooms around the world, we are appalled at the slaughter of our colleagues and their families by the Israeli military and government."

"We also hold Western newsrooms accountable for dehumanizing rhetoric that has served to justify ethnic cleansing of Palestinians,"

the letter continues. "This is our job: to hold power to account. Otherwise, we risk becoming accessories to genocide."

Zane McNeill reported for *Truthout* at the time that "LAT management claimed that signing the open letter violated the paper's ethics policy, but the policy contains no explicit prohibition against open letters." *LA Times* staff members argued that calls for newsrooms to produce unbiased coverage are not political, and therefore do not violate the publication's ethics policy against political advocacy, McNeill writes.[31]

Former *LA Times* reporter Adam Elmahrek points to this banning as a pivotal moment for his former publication. "It seemed for a moment at the *LA Times* that we had an opportunity to turn back the tide," he says. "There was a groundswell of support in the newsroom, and an owning family that was sympathetic, to say the least."

"And yet," says Elmahrek,

> in the end, a handful of legacy media folks at the top made sure we wouldn't succeed. What would have happened if the coverage ban had been rescinded, or if we took a sharp turn in our coverage against the genocide? The *LA Times* isn't the *New York Times*, but it still has clout as one of the biggest legacy media institutions in the country.

DOUBLE STANDARDS OF PUBLIC STATEMENTS IN MEDIA, ACADEMIA, AND THE NONPROFIT WORLD

The May 2024 National Writers Union report detailed over 100 different cases of retaliation against media workers in the months after October 7 because these workers expressed undue sympathy for Palestinians. Compare this with the zero American media workers fired after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, where expressions of solidarity and open support for Ukrainian fighters were widespread and unremarked upon. The picture that emerges from my reporting of which positions journalists were allowed to take and which they weren't goes roughly like this: Taking a position in liberal institutions is fine so long as it doesn't

meaningfully offend the prevailing hegemonic worldview. If it does, then it violates not the prevailing hegemonic worldview, but rather some abstract virtue of "neutrality" or "objectivity." Liberal institutions, run by lawyers and meritocracy-believing strivers, can't acknowledge that they are instruments of ideological disciplining. So they frame their punishment of those who step out of line not on explicitly ideological grounds, but under the selective and dubious auspices of "neutrality." Confronting the real reason for these social and professional pressures would expose how thin their nominal independence is, so instead, they frame their punishment not as *in support of* a particular political stance, but in opposition to politics as such.

Take one high-profile example: PEN America, which saw an outright mutiny from many of its staffers in the early weeks of the genocide over the organization's unwillingness to meet the most baseline, milquetoast demand of calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. For months, PEN America leadership rejected the demand that they back a ceasefire because, according to reporting in the *Intercept*, "doing so would fall outside the organization's free expression mandate." The hypocrisy did not go unnoticed by both PEN America staffers and high-profile commentators. PEN America had explicitly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and held several events in support of Ukrainian writers[32] and blackballed Russian writers.[33]

After the blowback for refusing to substantively comment on the thousands killed in Gaza, platforming pro-Israel voices, and balking at calling for a ceasefire, PEN America went[34] into damage control mode, publicly calling for a ceasefire almost six months after October 7, and trying to gather high-profile Palestinians to participate in a panel discussion. But the intellectuals they reached out to, namely journalist Rula Jebreal and human rights attorney Noura Erakat, rejected the invitation, refusing to be tokenized. The about-face turn taken by PEN America between February 2022 and October 2023 on its nominal stance over matters of killing civilians and human rights did not go unnoticed. "You went out of your way when Ukraine was under attack," Jebreal told PEN America, accord-

ing to her interview with the *Intercept*, "and now when it comes to Palestine, it's as if we don't exist."[35]

The hypocrisy was not just the purview of US media and the literary world—it was par for the course among elite educational institutions as well. In May 2024, Harvard announced that it would, according to the *New York Times*,[36] "no longer take positions on matters outside of the university." But when it was Russia invading Ukraine in 2022, the university did not hesitate to express empathy and explicitly take a side. Then-President Lawrence Bacow made it clear where the institution stood:

> Now is a time for all voices to be raised. The deplorable actions of Vladimir Putin put at risk the lives of millions of people and undermine the concept of sovereignty. Institutions devoted to the perpetuation of democratic ideals and to the articulation of human rights have a responsibility to condemn such wanton aggression.[37]

But as the carnage in Gaza became increasingly obscene and difficult to defend, moral stances became trapped in a fog of liberal equivocation and above-the-fray appeals to neutrality. In its reporting on the shift in policy at Harvard, the *New York Times* dutifully frames this pivot as a response to the fraught nature of the topic at hand, without commenting on the obvious power structures that make it fraught in the first place. "Perhaps unlike any other issue, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict split university communities, and clarified the downsides of such statements on highly contested topics," the *New York Times* notes.

The "downsides," of course, are pressure from the US government and wealthy donors. University presidents have been pushed out, adjuncts have been fired for merely mentioning suffering in Gaza, and countless other educators have been disciplined or fired. The Israel–Palestine issue is surely charged within the campus itself, but the "split" among students and faculty is not what was driving Harvard's newfound love of "saying less." It was coming from donors and, perhaps more importantly, it was rendering conspicuous Har-

vard's intimate and interdependent relationship with the US and Israeli military states.

The administrators of Northwestern University, which also unequivocally condemned Russia's invasion[38] and expressed solidarity with Israel following the October 7 attacks,[39] suddenly found their tongues tied as the body count mounted in Gaza. In September 2024, Northwestern formalized its newfound opposition to taking positions by "limiting University statements" on "public or geopolitical matters."[40] These universities were far from alone. A survey of top 25 US News and World Report colleges found that 50 percent of these schools—Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Northwestern, Yale, Cornell, Columbia, University of Michigan, Stanford, University of Pennsylvania, University of Virginia, Dartmouth, and UCLA—issued statements of support for Ukraine and/or Israel in February 2022 and October 2023, respectively, only to do a 180 after October 7 and issue formal policies against the university taking public stands on political issues. (University of Chicago was removed from the denominator due to its decades-old policy of institutional neutrality.)

Certain state legislatures took away the opportunity for their public colleges to engage in hypocrisy altogether: Alabama, Wisconsin, Tennessee, Texas, Indiana, Georgia, Utah, Minnesota, Idaho, and Iowa passed legislation in mid-2024, all crafted by pro-Israel organizations, requiring "institutional neutrality" for their public university systems to both prevent public statements in opposition to the genocide in Gaza and stem popular campus movement toward divesting in Israel and Israeli military firms. Just like that, and with the assistance of Republicans, the liberal cultural era of expressing opposition to racism, sexism, and other forms of systematic, historical oppressions was over.

As the genocide unfolded, the broader Liberal Rules-Based Order moral and political framework would continue to exist in zombie form, as if nothing had changed. Arbiters of "press freedom" waxed romantic about the need to protect "free press" and the sanctity of journalism, conspicuously ignoring Israel's role in killing, imprisoning, and silencing scores of journalists. As Ari Paul noted at Fairness

and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR),[41] *New York Times* publisher A.G. Sulzberger twice wrote about the global threat to journalists, once in the pages of the *Washington Post* in September 2024,[42] and again in the pages of his own paper in May 2025,[43] focusing in both pieces on the rise of press suppression in Russia, Hungary, India, and even within the United States under Trump. But, suspiciously, he made no mention at all of Israel, despite citing and linking to a Committee to Protect Journalists report that explicitly mentions Israel as the biggest violator of press rights.[44] The *Washington Post* editorial board warned about democratic backsliding in several middlebrow editorials, all of which, as a rule, ignored the US and Israeli role in killing journalists, imprisoning Palestinians for political speech, detaining thousands of Palestinians without trial, and targeting civic, educational, and religious institutions in Gaza. "Gone but not forgotten: Political prisoners are being disappeared,"[45] lamented a July 2024 editorial. The disappearances of "political prisoners" in Belarus, China, and Saudi Arabia were mentioned without noting Israel or the fact that it routinely imprisons Palestinians for posting memes, articles, or merely expressing joy at the release of their loved ones from Israeli prisons.

This double standard was expressed most nakedly in the liberal establishment's whiplash un-personing of activist Greta Thunberg throughout 2024 and into 2025. Once a darling of politicians and influential opinion pages for her climate activism—praised by everyone from Hillary Clinton to Barack Obama, and the recipient of fawning profiles and op-eds in the *New York Times*[46]—Thunberg was outcast from polite society after she leaned into Gaza activism, climaxing with her courageous participation in the June 2025 and October 2025 Freedom Flotillas, which sought to carry aid to Gaza. As Ari Paul also noted at FAIR,[47] the woman once described by former President Obama as "one of our planet's greatest advocates" was, once the cause became the ongoing Gaza genocide and not vague, Davos-friendly "climate" rhetoric, rendered *non grata* by elite liberal personalities.

Openly supporting Israel's genocide was untenable, but opposing it in any meaningful way was career and fundraising poison.

So liberal institutions instead invented new, ostensibly neutral standards of impartiality out of thin air to try and dodge the issue altogether, almost always drowning in the faux-savvy language of "complexity," "institutional neutrality," and "nuance." On matters that were safe, that did not threaten funding or attacks from pro-Israel pressure groups, that targeted enemy states or causes so generic as to offend no one in power (abstract and superficial rhetoric in support of racial or climate justice, for example), their concern for the downtrodden and oppressed was front and center. But when it came to war crimes backed by a Democratic president and widely supported by liberal institutions and donors, including Center-Left media outlets, acting above-the-fray and aggressively non-political became the go-to posture to mask what in fact was consistent, obvious, and well-documented ideological disciplining in service of Israeli and US national security priorities.

8

"Antisemitism" show trials and the smearing of campus protests

As the raw brutality of Israel's "military response" to the October 7 attack quickly became clear, especially to younger Americans who largely consumed the news from social media without the "War on Terror" or "human shields" narrative filter of mainstream press, young people decided to continue the long tradition of campus protesting to demand their universities end their role in propping up Israeli state violence and join the broader call for a ceasefire in Gaza. These protests, which later evolved into encampments, began in earnest in the early weeks of the genocide and peaked in the Spring of 2024. The campus encampment movement was met with swift backlash from US media, pro-Israel lobbying groups, local police, college administrators, campus police, and the Department of Homeland Security. When it was all said and done, by the end of 2024, some 3,100 people, mostly students, throughout the US had been detained or arrested, and thousands more faced harsh university discipline—suspension, expulsion, and loss of degree.[1]

Unlike previous anti-war protests in the United States, however, the primary justification for the government and university crackdown wasn't framed in traditional authoritarian terms like "security," "order," or "patriotism,' but instead in the squishy liberal-ese of "student safety"—namely that concerned with alleged "campus antisemitism." Evidence for widespread campus antisemitism, as we will show, remained thin, bad-faith, and highly weaponized. It hinged on ignoring Jewish leadership in the campus protests, was frequently itself racist, and was largely dependent on unreliable self-reporting and a conflation of opposition to the State of Israel with discrimination or harassment of Jewish students as such.

THE *CAMPUS ANTISEMITISM TREND PIECE* AND THE TOTAL COLLAPSE OF ZIONISM AND JEWISH IDENTITY

A review of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, CNN.com, the Associated Press, the *LA Times*, *USA Today*, *Politico*, and *Axios* finds a total of 372 articles in the first six months after October 7, 2023 focusing largely or entirely on antisemitism, and only five dedicated largely or entirely to anti-Muslim racism/Islamophobia. There were 22 articles that centered on both antisemitism and Islamophobia, but in every one of these antisemitism occupied the overwhelming majority of analysis and reporting.

This dynamic is even more apparent when focusing, as the media increasingly did in late 2023, on American college campuses. As opposition to Israel's destruction of Gaza began to grow going into November 2023 and campus protests took root, a framing began to emerge in US media and the halls of Congress: The primary victims of the bombing and siege of Gaza were not the Palestinians being killed by US bombs and starved by a US-backed blockade, but rather, "Jewish students" on US campuses who, we were consistently told, were being made to "feel unsafe" and under siege from—at best—a torrent of ethnic-based discrimination and harassment, and—at worst—a proto-pogrom in higher education driven by the campus protests. The evidence for this was, and would remain, wanting. But it felt vaguely true and, most important of all, it would be inconvenient for the US war machine if it were not so.

The incentives to exaggerate this dynamic were obvious. It painted support for Palestine as inherently rooted in hatred of Jewish people, it warped the obvious power asymmetries at play, and it discouraged people from joining protests lest they be labeled antisemites. Existing liberal frameworks, namely campus policies against discrimination, were weaponized in order to silence protests quickly and without much discussion. The only side in the conflict in Gaza that has tanks, fighter jets, sophisticated weaponry, warships, and nuclear weapons was reframed as fighting on behalf of an oppressed minority under siege around the globe.

Organizations like the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) and the aforementioned ADL pushed out these narratives,

with dubious "surveys" and urgently spiking line graphs—almost always intentionally conflating Jewish identity and political support for Israel and its campaign of destruction in Gaza. From this dynamic emerged what we will call the Campus Antisemitism Trend Piece, a particular genre of ideologically motivated anti-racism reportage designed to lend liberal legitimacy to the narrative that anti-war protests were not motivated by a desire to stop the killing of countless children in Gaza, but a manifestation of otherwise latent anti-Jewish hatred among America's increasingly Hamas-ified wayward youth. This genre, as a matter of course, always involved cherry-picked examples, unverified self-reporting, no examination of pro-Israel pressure groups' potential ulterior motives, and a complete conflation of Jewish religious and cultural identity with Zionist ideology. They were almost always accompanied by a gloomy photo of a "Jewish student" looking sad and alone on campus to convey their desperation and alienation.

A review of six major campus antisemitism trend pieces—from CNN, NBC News, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*,[2] the *LA Times*,[3] and *Politico*[4]—finds that of the 49 examples of antisemitism cited in these stories, only six, or 12.2 percent, are verified incidents of actual antisemitism, separate from the context of those individuals supporting Israel's actions in Gaza. Two were self-reporting that could not be verified, ten were indexed as ambiguous (incidents where the motivation behind the confrontation or attack isn't clear based on reports), and 31 were incidents where the person allegedly being attacked or confronted was engaging in overt pro-Israel political activity at the time of the incident. Of course, any incident of antisemitism is unacceptable; six antisemitic attacks are six too many. But the issue here is that the line between antisemitism and confrontations for political reasons is blurred, which does a disservice to sincere efforts to do the morally urgent work of combating antisemitism.

In particular, the *New York Times*' standard for what constituted campus antisemitism was extremely loose and solipsistic. Take one early example of the genre, a profile of "antisemitism" on campus at Northwestern University in Chicago,[5] published in November 2023. It opens with the following vignette:

> In the days after the Hamas attack on Israel, Max Strozenberg, a first-year student at Northwestern University, experienced a couple of jarring incidents. Walking into his dorm, he was startled to see a poster calling Gaza a "modern-day concentration camp" pinned to a bulletin board next to Halloween ghosts and pumpkins. At a pro-Palestinian rally, he heard students shouting, "Hey, Schill, what do you say, how many kids did you kill today?" an echo of a chant from the anti-Vietnam War movement, now directed at Northwestern's president, Michael H. Schill, who is Jewish.

Nothing described in these paragraphs is remotely antisemitic. Referring to Gaza as a "concentration camp" is consistent with Human Rights Watch's 2022 finding that Gaza was "an open air prison" where

> sweeping restrictions on leaving Gaza deprive its more than two million residents of opportunities to better their lives … The closure has devastated the economy in Gaza, contributed to fragmentation of the Palestinian people, and forms part of Israeli authorities' crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution against millions of Palestinians.[6]

The fact that the University president happens to be Jewish is irrelevant, as similar chants directed at University presidents could be heard at various college campuses, many of whom were not Jewish.

Typical of the genre, students engaged in overtly pro-Israel activity are reduced to "Jewish students," implying that anger over their rhetoric and counterprotests was motivated by sectarian hate and anti-Jewish bias rather than by the ideological content of their chants, signs, and cause. The *New York Times* would write, "at the Cooper Union, a private college in New York City, frightened Jewish students huddled behind locked doors at a library, while demonstrators shouted "Free Palestine" and banged on the doors and windows." But, as the linked Times article made clear, these were "about 20 pro-Israel students" counter-protesting a pro-

Palestine demonstration. So they weren't simply "Jewish students" in any useful sense; they were "pro-Israel" counter-protesters, some of whom happened to be Jewish. The conflation of pro-Israel activists with "Jewish students" was routine in US media and gave readers the broad impression that campuses were on the verge, or in the middle of, antisemitic pogroms.

The next example cited by the *New York Times*—and one featured in several of the Very Serious campus antisemitism features—was one incident from October 2023 at Cornell where a computer science major, Patrick Dai, was arrested after making online threats to, according to the *New York Times*, "shoot up a kosher dining hall and rape and murder Jewish students." Scary and traumatizing, of course, but not evidence of antisemitism stemming from Palestinian political activity because, according to the student's lawyers, the perpetrator was allegedly trying to smear the pro-Palestine cause. The hate crime was, according to his counsel, a "misguided attempt to highlight Hamas' genocidal beliefs and garner support for Israel. He believed, wrongly, that the posts would prompt a 'blowback' against what he perceived as anti-Israel media coverage and pro-Hamas sentiment on campus."[7]

It's, of course, very possible that Dai and his attorneys were simply saying this to reduce his prison sentence, but there is zero evidence Dai had any links to any pro-Palestine groups or any history of support for Palestine prior to his phone threat, something no media ever bothered to mention.

It's not as if there weren't incidents of genuine antisemitism on campus. For example, there was a November 2023 attack on two Ohio State students,[8] and an October 2024 assault of two University of Pittsburgh students,[9] both for simply being visibly Jewish. And there is the occasional protest chant that would veer into, to put it mildly, insensitivity—like one Columbia student in August 2024 caught on tape chanting "go back to Poland." (Why, one is compelled to ask, do they think Jews may have left Poland in the first place?) But digging into most high-profile examples, one finds the supposed incidents of antisemitism are often ambiguous, self-reported, or, as was frequently the case, engaging in overt pro-Israel

activity. Indeed, much of this can be traced to the way in which Zionist political activity is conflated and interwoven with other aspects of Jewish cultural life. Fundraisers for the IDF or land sales of stolen Palestinian land hosted by synagogues, for example, led to a series of misleading headlines giving readers the impression that pro-Palestinian protesters were targeting non-Israeli or apolitical Jewish cultural and religious institutions simply because they were Jewish.

In late June of 2024, two California synagogues held back-to-back events titled "Real Estate in Israel." One of the partners for the event was My Home in Israel, a company that lists sales of properties in illegal Israeli settlements, including Ariel and Efrat.[10] An advertisement for the event said, "Come and meet representatives of housing projects in all the best Anglo neighborhoods in Israel."[11]

Pro-Palestine demonstrators, understandably, were concerned that this event promotes the theft of Palestinian land, at a time of intensified and violent dispossession and displacement in the West Bank. From October 7, 2023, to June 3, 2024, Israeli forces "demolished, confiscated or forced the owners to demolish 904 Palestinian structures, of which 39 per cent (350 structures) were inhabited homes," according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "As a result, 2,038 people, including 890 children, were displaced."[12]

One such real estate "mega-event" was held at Adas Torah Synagogue in Los Angeles. Protesters showed up, and so did counter-protesters. The situation turned volatile, with pro-Palestine demonstrators being met with racial slurs and physical violence, as women had hijabs ripped from their heads, and that the LAPD allowed them to be brutalized by pro-Israel demonstrators.

Yet, the bulk of the reporting that emerged from the episode was a predictably sectarian narrative about pro-Palestine demonstrators targeting Jewish institutions as such, and Jewish people more broadly, with no political context for what was actually happening at the synagogue itself, and even though protesters say there were no religious services taking place at the time of the protests. "Pro-Palestinian protest outside LA synagogue criticized as 'antise-

mitic' after street fights with pro-Israel protesters," reads a June 24, 2024, headline on CNN. The article only reveals, roughly halfway through, that the protesters were demonstrating against an Israeli real estate event.[13]

A *New York Times* article published the same day was headlined, "Biden and Democratic Leaders Condemn Protest Outside L.A. Synagogue as Antisemitic." This article mentions the real estate event in the fifth paragraph, but by that time the reader had already been hammered with the lede, "A protest outside of a synagogue in Los Angeles' most densely populated Jewish enclave on Sunday drew unusually swift and forceful condemnation from top Democratic leaders including President Biden, reigniting debates about the boundaries of acceptable protest as tensions over the war in Gaza continue to flare across the country."[14]

"Police patrols increased after protesters clash outside Los Angeles synagogue," read an NBC News headline.[15] "'Antisemitic, and un-American': Biden condemns violence outside LA synagogue," said *Politico*.[16] "Feds investigating violence during pro-Palestinian protest outside Los Angeles synagogue," reported the Associated Press.[17]

But none of the pro-Israel pressure groups or media outlets regurgitating their press releases about the alleged "wave of antisemitism" were at all concerned with parsing these nuances, much less explaining them to their readers and viewers. Over and over again, those engaging in deliberate, open Zionist advocacy—when confronted, counter-protested or attacked—suddenly became "Jewish students" to give the public the distinct impression that the reason for the pushback or violence they faced was motivated entirely by sectarian hate. This is not, of course, to argue that confrontations that escalated from counter-protest to violence are warranted, but rather, to show that the way these confrontations were covered was routinely done so in sensationalist terms to maximize the appearance of inter-ethnic conflict, while downplaying or ignoring altogether clear—and far more consequential—ideological differences.

Take CNN's report, "'I have become traumatized.' Jewish students describe campus antisemitism." In typical form for the genre, the

piece would explain how "Hannah Beth Schlacter, an MBA student at the University of California, Berkeley's Haas School of Business, accused the university of fostering an environment where Jewish students are not given equal opportunity to learn and participate in activities." But then, CNN goes on to discuss the actual impetus for Schlacter's complaints. "Earlier in the week, protesters disrupted an event by banging on and shattering glass doors to the auditorium where Israeli Defense Forces soldiers were scheduled to speak, videos posted on social media show," the article states. CNN linked to a JCRC video with the caption, "Last night at @UCBerkeley, Jewish students were threatened, assaulted, and prevented from attending a speech by a Jewish speaker on campus."[18]

But the "Jewish speakers on campus" were active duty IDF soldiers recruiting students to join a war broadly considered by that point genocidal in nature. How is this antisemitism? Or put differently, how could students protest Israel carrying out a genocide and target those actively working for its military without it being seen as a racially motivated hate crime?

NBC News also did a typically dishonest "investigation" into campus antisemitism, headlined, "Five Jewish college students report being assaulted in the last month, as Oct. 7 anniversary approaches." The sub-headline would lay out the stakes: "Dozens of universities have vowed tougher responses to curtail violence and disruptions, NBC News found. But few have explained how they will effectively enforce them."[19]

The article, which led with a genuine example of antisemitic hate crimes (the aforementioned University of Pittsburgh assault on Jewish students), proceeded to document cases that were either based entirely on personal testimony of pro-Israel students or students being attacked or harassed for open advocacy of Israel and its military assault on Gaza:

- "At Tulane University, a student said their nose was broken after a protester struck them in the head with a megaphone." The student was a pro-Israel counterprotester.

- "UCLA, where Jewish students said they were banned by protesters from entering a 'Jew Exclusion Zone,'" UCLA had no such zone; they had a zone where they did not allow those who supported Israel to enter. The camp had several Jewish protesters and leaders drawn from Jewish Voice for Peace.
- The article would cite the Patrick Dai Cornell hate crime without noting that Dai had no prior affiliation with any pro-Palestine group or causes.
- Cites the case of Ben Goldies being assaulted at Hunter College. Goldies was engaging in explicit pro-Israel advocacy.
- Cites the case of Atid Malka, who was attacked at Emory University while they held an Israeli flag outside a speech given by two members of the Israel Defense Forces.

Time and again, the media would frame those attacked or harassed for open pro-Israel activity as being attacked or harassed *because* they were "Jewish students". Take one typical local media report from *Fox 32 Chicago* in November 2024: "Two DePaul students were ambushed on campus in an antisemitic attack, and now they and other Jewish organizations are calling out the university, saying they didn't do enough to intervene."[20] This general narrative was reflected in most media coverage. "2 Jewish students sue DePaul University for negligence after antisemitic attack on campus," CBS News Chicago told us.[21] "'It was a horrendous crime': 2 Jewish students attacked at DePaul University speak out after being targeted," NBC News 5 added.[22]

Buried in the Fox 32 report was a pretty important detail: "The Nov. 6 incident involved two Jewish students who say *they were attacked while standing outside the Student Center advocating for Israel, something they had done for several days*."

So which is it? Was it an antisemitic hate crime targeting students because they were Jewish, or was it because they were "advocating" for a genocidal army "for several days?" It's possible the attacker was a mindless antisemite who just so happened to attack Jewish students *while they were sitting on a street corner advocating for a nation-state's military,* but shouldn't this key context be in the

headline, put in the lede, made obvious to the reader? It's critical, not incidental. Some semi-responsible outlets did split the difference and use the sectarian framing while at least mentioning their pro-IDF advocacy. ("Two Jewish students attacked while supporting Israel on campus sue DePaul," said *WBEZ Chicago*.)[23] But the general impression readers and viewers were given while reading about the DePaul attack, and "campus antisemitism" more broadly, is advocacy for what Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Doctors Without Borders had labeled a genocide was, *per se*, an expression of ethno-religious identity in urgent need of minority protection.

What's important to note as well is that while there are scores of examples of mainstream US media describing confrontations or attacks on overt pro-Israel activity as "antisemitism," there are zero examples of them framing attacks on pro-Palestine activity as, *per se*, Islamophobia, anti-Arab racism, or anti-Palestinian racism. High-profile examples, such as Zionist vigilantes attacking Gaza protesters at UCLA in April 2024,[24] or chemical attacks on pro-Palestine protesters at Columbia in January 2024,[25] when the incidents were reported at all, were never framed by any mainstream media outlets as Islamophobic, anti-Arab or anti-Palestinian racism. When the subject of violence or verbal assaults was pro-Israel, this was explicitly or implicitly put in sectarian terms—removing politics from the story. When they were Palestinian or advocating on behalf of Palestine, this was never said to be animated by any comparable racial hatred, and the assaults were framed in purely secular, ideological terms—displaying yet another glaring double standard in journalistic conventions.

ERASURE OF JEWISH LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION IN CAMPUS GAZA PROTESTS

One way this distortion was propped up was the constant erasure of Jewish leadership and participation in campus protests, and simultaneously the consistent centering of pro-Israel Jewish students as platonically *Jewish*. The highest profile offender was the *New*

York Times, which almost always discussed the American public response and the campus response to the Gaza genocide in somber, ill-defined sectarian terms. Their coverage gave readers the broad impression that the divide was "anti-Israel protesters" versus "Jewish students" and/or the broader Jewish community—which is painted as a pro-Israel monolith and in a constant state of collective anguish, hurt feelings and main character syndrome.

The ADL and other Zionist advocacy organizations would counter the claim that they don't represent the whole of Jewish opinion by insisting that the majority of American Jews back Israel. While this is true in abstract terms based on most polls, post-October 7 polls show Jewish American opinion to be far more nuanced, especially among the younger demographic represented on America's campuses. One Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs poll of Jewish Americans taken at the height of campus protests in May 2024 found that over 30 percent of Jewish Americans agreed with the accusation that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza, with 38 percent of Jewish Americans under 44 holding this position (for college-age Jewish Americans, the number was no doubt higher). The poll also found that 51 percent of Jewish Americans agreed with the protests' central demand of an arms embargo against Israel in the event it invaded Rafah (which it did).[26] But one would hardly know this from reading US media where "Jewish students" were almost entirely painted as a Zionist monolith.

This distortion was on display during Spring 2024, as the student encampment movement spread across the country. Numerous lawmakers and the ADL tried to use the Passover holiday as an opportunity to criminalize the protests, allegedly in defense of Jewish students. In April of 2024, as the holiday began, Republican Senators Tom Cotton and Josh Hawley called for President Biden to send the National Guard to Columbia. "The nascent pogroms at Columbia have to stop TODAY, before our Jewish brethren sit for Passover Seder tonight," Cotton said on Twitter/X on April 22, the first night of Passover. "If Eric Adams won't send the NYPD and Kathy Hochul won't send the National Guard, Joe Biden has a duty to take charge and break up these mobs."[27]

That same day, Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the ADL, issued a similar call on Twitter/X, urging a deployment of the NYPD or the National Guard to Columbia to "protect our kids."[28]

Yet, on the exact day these statements were issued, Columbia's Gaza solidarity encampment was holding its own Liberation Seder, led by progressive Jews. It was an image of non-sectarian and respectful participation in an important Jewish holiday. Arielle Angel, the editor-in-chief of *Jewish Currents*, wrote about the experience on Twitter/X. "Explaining the Seder plate at the Columbia encampment. These students truly embody the meaning of Passover in their provisional Seder and their commitment to liberation," she posted. She included a photograph of a diverse group of encampment participants, many of them wearing Keffiyehs, gathered around a Seder plate.[29]

Liberation Seders took place at Gaza solidarity encampments at the University of Pittsburgh, University of Minnesota, Yale University, University of Michigan, University of Southern California, Brown University, UCLA, UC Berkeley, Swarthmore, Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Western Washington University.

Hundreds attended one at Yale, organized by Yale Jews for Ceasefire and the New Haven Chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace. Protesters gathered around a sheet decorated to look like a Seder table, next to a banner that said, "Our Seder plates are empty, stop starving Gaza."[30]

"We as Jews have this idea of 'Tikkun olam'—to repair the world," Zoe Kanter, a student member of Yale Jews for Ceasefire, told ABC News. "And that's really a guiding principle for me … recognizing where there is injustice and suffering and working to repair it any way possible."[31]

And beyond campuses, Jews were taking to the streets during the holiday. "Jews and people of conscience are pouring into the streets, inspired by the lessons of Passover—the Jewish holiday of liberation—to do everything in their power to demand an end to U.S. complicity in genocide," Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) wrote in a statement released during Passover 2024.[32] The organization said in a press statement over email that JVP members led Passover Seders

and actions in more than two dozen places, from Pittsburgh to Minneapolis to Los Angeles to Maine.

This included a gathering of thousands of Jews and other people of conscience who held an emergency Seder of 3,000 on Senator Chuck Schumer's doorstep, demanding an end to US arms shipments to Israel. The action resulted in more than 200 arrests. In New Orleans, Jews blocked traffic for two hours with a large Seder table. The liberation Seders that took place in the streets were inspired by the Freedom Seder of 1969, held on the first anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

JVP criticized the failure to recognize this Jewish participation. "The U.S. media and anti-Palestinian politicians insist on telling a different story: one of unruly mobs and anti-Jewish hatred," the organization said at the time.

> This playbook is familiar to justice movements across time and geography: portraying isolated individuals or intentional provocateurs who spew antisemitic hatred as a reflection of our peaceful movements, even though movement organizers, leaders, and spokespeople condemn these individuals, and are extremely clear that antisemitism has no place in the fight for collective liberation. In doing so, they ignore that U.S. Jews have been some of the most active voices demanding divestment from Israeli apartheid and genocide on college campuses and in cities across the country.

The need to urgently punish and marginalize Jewish academics who didn't abide by the sectarian binary extended to faculty as well. On June 5, 2024, the University of Minnesota tapped Israeli-American Jewish scholar, Raz Segal, to direct the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (CHGS). Segal is a scholar in modern genocide and had published an article in *Jewish Currents* on October 13, 2023, about Israel's military actions in Gaza, titled "A Textbook Case of Genocide."[33] Even though Segal was criticizing the actions of his own government, the hiring set off a pressure campaign waged by individuals and organizations, including the Jewish Community

Relations Council (JCRC) of Minnesota and the Dakotas. The organization accused Segal of extremism and circulated an action alert: "ACT NOW: Tell U of M leaders to reverse this outrageous decision."

The organization circulated a template letter to encourage supporters to contact the leadership of the university. The letter hinged on the equation of criticism of Israel with antisemitism. "Since the Jewish community's trust in the University is already at an all-time low, hiring someone who demonizes the world's only Jewish state to lead CHGS would be among the most insulting possible decisions the University could make," that letter stated. On June 10, 2024, less than a week after the hiring of Segal had been announced, the university's interim president at the time, Jeff Ettinger, rescinded the offer.

Speaking with *Democracy Now!* on June 18, Segal expressed outrage at such open political intervention in an otherwise standard academic hiring process.

> This actually might be a case of discrimination, because I'm targeted here specifically as an Israeli American Jew, and I'm targeted because of my identity as a Jew who refuses the narrowing down of Jewish identity to Zionism and to support of Israel, whatever it does, which is the position of the JCRC of Minnesota and the Dakotas in its claim to speak for all Jews in the Twin Cities, which is absolutely false.[34]

The ADL has played a key role in painting university life as plagued by antisemitism. In addition to panicked daily email messages—always led with an alert emoji—frightening media outlets, the public and donors, it maintains an "antisemitism report card," which it uses to grade 85 universities, resulting in headlines like this one published April 11, 2024 at CNN: "ADL gives Harvard and a dozen other universities failing grades on campus antisemitism."[35]

But if one looks at the actual methodology that the ADL uses, which the organization describes on its website, it is clear that conflation of anti-Zionism or criticism of Israel with antisemitism was central to its assessments. The organization said that its researchers

surveyed Jewish students about how welcoming and inclusive their universities are for Jewish students. But then this is how the ADL describes the questions that it asked:

> All Jewish students surveyed as part of this effort were asked a series of questions broadly measuring the following three things: 1) the relative importance students ascribe to various policies and procedures related to Jewish students; 2) the relative importance of various types of Jewish life on campus; and 3) how concerning the presence of anti-Zionist groups, anti-Zionist student government referenda and different types of antisemitic and anti-Zionist incidents on campus are to them as Jewish students.

But why the assumption that anti-Zionist groups are concerning to Jewish students? Jewish students have been disproportionately represented at the sit-ins. They have shared their Seder plates and had Shabbat services at the encampments. Why not ask these students about their own experiences with repression from the administration? The ADL is asking a leading question that deliberately blurs the line between criticism of Zionism as a political ideology and antisemitism.

But there is another problem here: Even if some students were to report that they were upset by anti-Zionist groups on campus, this is not *per se* evidence of discrimination. People feel all sorts of things; this does not elevate everyone's feelings to something politically useful. In the context of an ongoing genocide backed by the only nuclear power in the region and the largest military on earth, such discourse flips power dynamics on their head and serves little purpose beyond cynical manipulation. Many Republicans think the 2020 election was stolen, and even more think minorities are seeking to replace them in their communities. These feelings of anti-white discrimination are not taken seriously by mainstream media. But, when it comes to Gaza protests, relatively comfortable and privileged pro-Israel students were routinely painted as arbiters of their own discrimination, totally independent of any broader material assessment as to whether this is true or acknowl-

edgment that, according to the aforementioned poll, a plurality of college-aged American Jews believed Israel was committing genocide.

CLAUDINE GAY, THE DECEMBER 2023 CONGRESSIONAL "CAMPUS ANTISEMITISM HEARINGS," AND THE ANATOMY OF A *NEW YORK TIMES* META-SCANDAL

To bolster the thin, but necessary, narrative that campuses were hotbeds of anti-Jewish hatred, pro-Israel pressure groups and their Republican allies in Congress decided to haul elite university presidents in front of Congress and grill them about the supposed "crisis of antisemitism on American campuses" and demand they denounce, it would turn out, an entirely hypothetical call for mass violence against Jewish people.

Beginning in December 2023, the heads of America's elite colleges came "under fire"[36] for "evasive answers"[37] to questions as to whether or not they would bar students for "calling for the genocide of Jews" on campus. The confusion emerged initially because Rep. Elise Stefanik asked administrators whether universities would punish students for using the word "intifada," which she asserted was, *per se*, a call "for the genocide of Jews." The presidents balked at this characterization of the term, more correctly translated as "uprising," which—once introduced into media and pundit discourse—came to be accepted uncritically by the media: not as resistance against Israel's occupation, apartheid, and war, but as a generalized call for "genocide against Jews." The university presidents said they would punish any speech that resulted in targeted intimidation or physical violence, but said punishing pure speech, even if calling for violence against any group, fell into a legal gray area of policing speech. What resulted was headline after headline about how "leaders of Harvard, M.I.T. and Penn appeared to evade questions about whether students should be disciplined if they call for the genocide of Jews,"[38] and "Calling for genocide of Jews doesn't violate school policy, university presidents tell Congress."[39]

"'It's unbelievable that this needs to be said: calls for genocide are monstrous,' White House deputy press secretary Andrew Bates said in a statement," read one *Washington Post* sub-headline.[40]

There was, of course, one problem: There never were any documented calls for genocide of Jewish students made by college activists anywhere on any campus. The question was entirely hypothetical, resulting from a bad-faith interpretation of the word "intifada." It was all smoke and no fire. It was a meta-scandal, which is a scandal based on some underlying ginned-up scandal, manufactured out of whole cloth by leading questions, sensationalized by the media, and designed to demagogue and misinform the public. The intended and predictable result of the December 2023 "college antisemitism" Congressional show trials was an uptick in criminalizing campus Gaza activism, which, by the end of 2024, saw some 3,100 students throughout the US detained or arrested, and thousands more facing harsh university discipline—suspension, expulsion, and loss of degree. This crackdown culminated with the Trump administration seizing on the bipartisan moral panic to arrest or deport upwards of 300 Gaza activists as of March 2025.[41]

What media outlets focus on, and what viewers are told to care about, is not an entirely organic creation. There's no evidence that the late 2023 Congressional questioning of college presidents was of any general or popular interest. Water coolers were not abuzz with discussions about what bad-faith questions Congress would throw at heretofore unknown university administrators. Nevertheless, American media consumers were fed a steady stream of breathless updates, opinion columns, coverage of the coverage, front-page headlines, endless cable news punditry and play-by-play of the spectacle. The most prominent example was the testimony of then-Harvard president Claudine Gay and the subsequent "plagiarism" scandal and meta-scandal used to drive her from her post.[42]

To show the disproportionality of coverage, we will compare US media's coverage of the Claudine Gay "scandal" with their coverage, or lack thereof, of a story that happened in the immediate period after: the killing of Hind Rajab, a 5-year-old Palestinian girl murdered by the IDF along with six of her family members and

two paramedics, who were gunned down on January 29, 2024 by Israel forces as they attempted to rescue her.[43] Hind's heart-wrenching emergency call made global headlines and, like the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital bombing the previous October, could have been a galvanizing moment against Israel's ongoing genocide. It was, instead, largely ignored by US media, relegated to a scattering of articles and two CNN segments before quickly disappearing from the list of things Americans were led to care about. For the purposes of comparative analysis we are asserting that the US-backed killing of a small child, her family, and medical rescue workers is objectively more newsworthy than bad-faith Republican questioning of a university president, followed by allegations that said president may or may not have committed plagiarism decades prior.

During the peak of the Claudine Gay fervor, our one-month survey from December 5, 2023, to January 5, 2024, found that major US print/online publications ran a total of 207 different stories about or including substantive mention of Claudine Gay. The *New York Times* ran 79, *Politico* 57, *Washington Post* 23, *USA Today* 14, *Axios* 26, and Associated Press eight. By contrast, the killing of Hind Rajab garnered a total of five articles during our comparable survey period of January 29, 2024, through March 1, 2024, the one-month period after she was killed. Zero in *Politico*, *Axios*, and *USA Today*, two in the *New York Times*, two in the *Washington Post*, and one in Associated Press.

Cable news was even more lopsided, with CNN mentioning Gay 409 times and MSNBC mentioning her 210. By contrast, CNN mentioned Hind Rajab 29 times in a total of two segments, one from February 1, the other from February 11. MSNBC did not mention Hind Rajab once on-air in the month following her killing from January 29, 2024, through March 1, 2024.

The *New York Times*' intense focus on the Claudine Gay story and all of its iterations was uniquely disproportionate. A review of the *New York Times*' homepage shows Claudine Gay-related stories cracking the top five news items on 15 out of the 31 days of our survey period—December 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 21, 22, 23, 25, and January 3 and 4 for a total of 28 front webpage stories. By contrast,

during the month after the killing of Hind Rajab, the *New York Times* mentioned Rajab on the web and print front pages zero times.

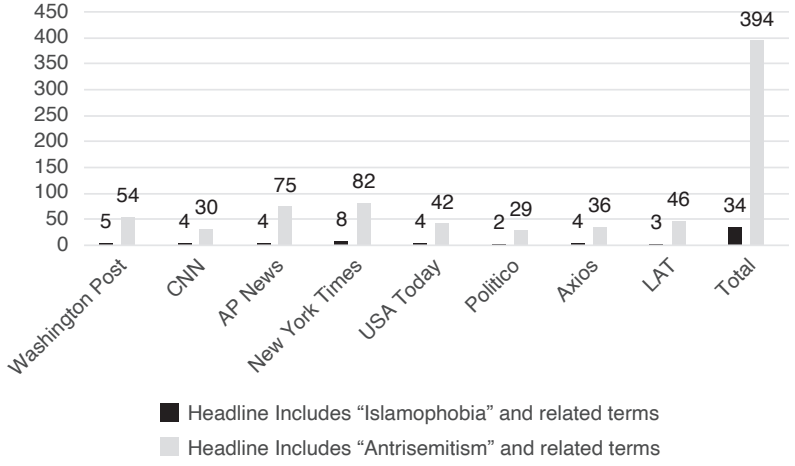

Figure 8.1 Count of headlines including terms "Islamophobia" and/or "Antisemitism" (and variants) during the first 6 months of the conflict.

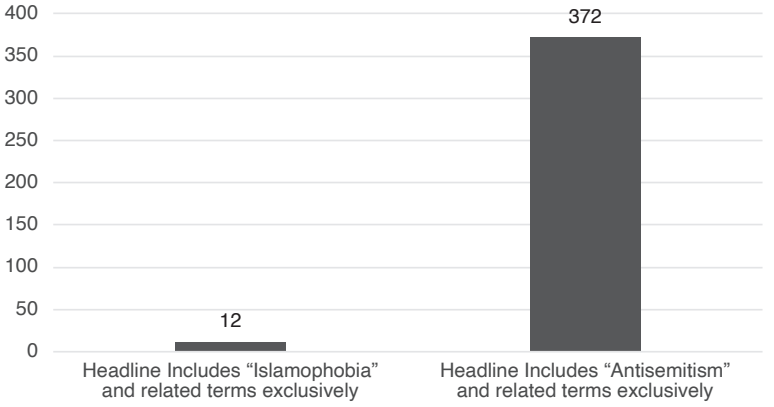

Figure 8.2 Summary of all headlines exclusively about "Islamophobia" or "Antisemitism" during the first 6 months of the conflict.

Widening the frame to the broader issue of how Israel's assault on Gaza was negatively impacting children, the discrepancy is even

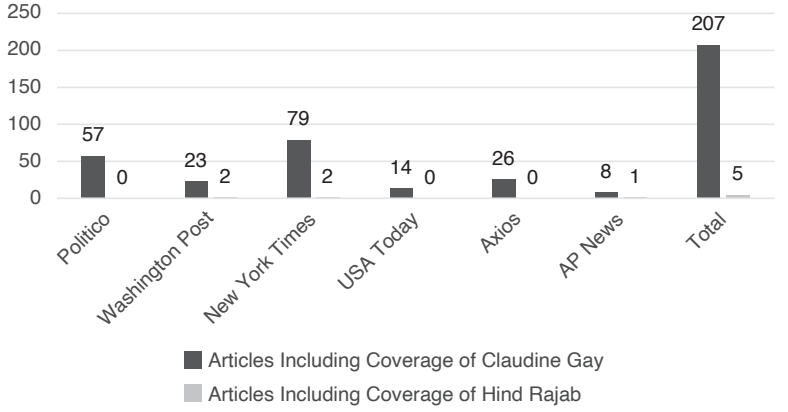

Figure 8.3 Count of articles including coverage of Claudine Gay (between December 5, 2023, to January 5, 2024) and articles including coverage of Hind Rajab (between January 29 and March 1 2024).

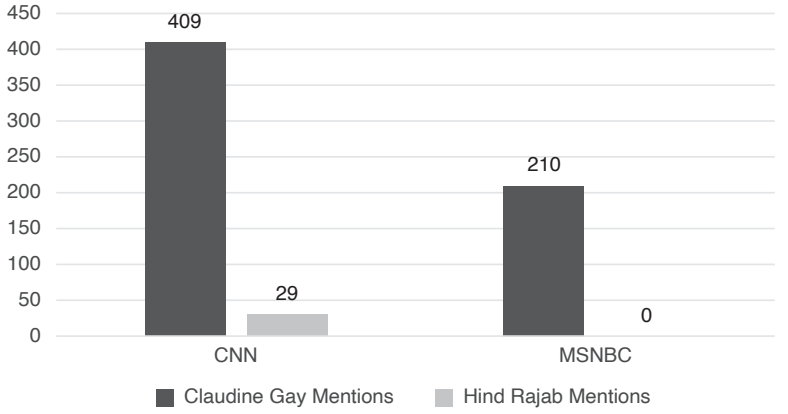

Figure 8.4 Count of on-air mentions of Claudine Gay (between December 5, 2023, to January 5, 2024) and on-air mentions of Hind Rajab (between January 29 and March 1, 2024).

greater. During the height of the Claudine Gay "scandal," December 5, 2023, to January 5, 2024, Israel killed over 3,000 children in Gaza.[44] Despite this appalling and heretofore unprecedented death count, the *New York Times*, *Politico*, *Axios*, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post* and the Associated Press collectively ran a total of six stories

where the plight of children in Gaza was centered in the headline of the story. By contrast, during this same time period, these outlets ran a total of 95 articles where Claudine Gay was centered in the headline of the story.

ANTISEMITISM WAS CENTRAL, ISLAMOPHOBIA WAS AN AFTERTHOUGHT OR IGNORED

Even if one accepted the narrative that there was widespread antisemitism on college campuses, using the same standard of evidence, one would have to conclude there also existed a massive uptick in Islamophobia or anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, anti-Palestinian racism on college campuses. High-profile examples include a Muslim Stanford student hospitalized in a suspected hate crime hit-and-run in November 2023,[45] the shooting of three visibly Palestinian students in Vermont in December 2023,[46] right-wing vigilantes attacking peaceful Gaza protesters with sticks, tear gas, and physical assaults on the UCLA campus in April–May 2024,[47] the stabbing of a Palestinian-American on the University of Texas campus, as the assailant yelled out racial slurs, in February 2024.[48]

But only one of these narratives was made central, urgent and substantively covered. An analysis of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Politico*, the Associated Press, *Axios*, and *USA Today* shows that in the six months after October 7 these outlets mentioned antisemitism on college campuses (without also mentioning Islamophobia in the same clause) 1,385 times (*New York Times*: 412, *Washington Post*: 197, *Politico*: 370, Associated Press: 154, *Axios*: 123, and *USA Today*: 129). Anti-Muslim hate or Islamophobia on college campuses, by contrast, was only mentioned by itself 22 times (*New York Times* five times, *Washington Post* once, *Politico* three times, Associated Press News four, *Axios* once, and *USA Today* eight). Both antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate/Islamophobia were mentioned together 191 times, but in this context, mentioning Islamophobia was typically a box-checking exercise and the analysis or comment that followed focused entirely on antisemitism.

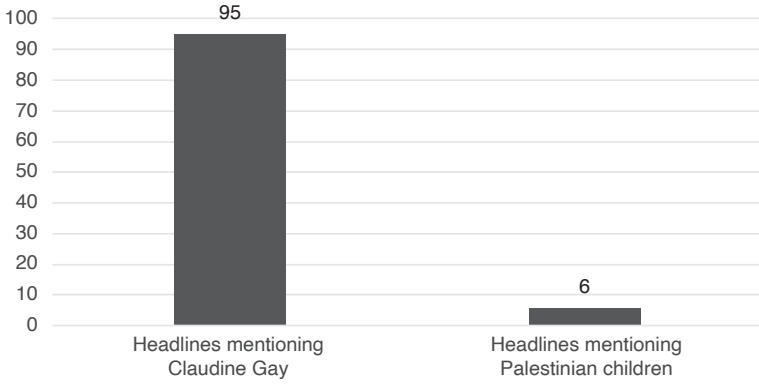

Figure 8.5 Mentions of Claudine Gay or Palestinian child victims in headlines in the *New York Times*, *Politico*, *Axios*, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post* and the Associated Press during December 5, 2023 to January 5, 2024. During this period over 3,000 children were killed.

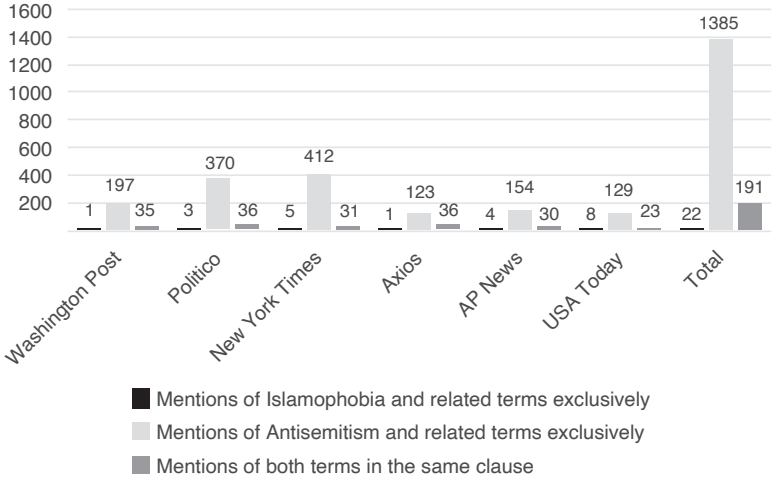

Figure 8.6 Count of exclusive mentions of antisemitism and islamophobia, respectively, in relation to college campuses during the first six months of the conflict.

Cable News displayed a similar double standard. In the six-month period after Israel began its assault on Gaza, antisemitism on college campuses was mentioned on the two cable networks 797 times

(CNN 408, MSNBC 389), and Islamophobia on college campuses was mentioned only 72 times (CNN 24, MSNBC 48).

Despite the fact that surveys of students consistently found that Muslim and Jewish students either had comparable levels of "fearing for their safety,"[49] or Muslims felt greater fear, as was the case at Harvard,[50] threats to Muslim student safety on US campuses were consistently downplayed and ignored. Columbia, which became ground zero for the alleged wave of antisemitism, housed the Pulitzer Prize Board, which, in 2024, counted the *Atlantic*'s Anne Applebaum among its members. In 2002, Applebaum advocated for the killing of Palestinian journalists for the crime of making Israel and the US look bad, writing for *Slate Magazine*:

> … the official Palestinian media is the right place for Israel to focus its ire. In fact, in the reporting of the Middle East conflict, which almost always focuses on yesterday's violence and today's body count, the crucial role of the Voice of Palestine—the official broadcasting arm of the Palestinian Authority—has often been overlooked. Nor is the problem just radio and television. If you want to understand why the Oslo peace process failed, or where suicide martyrs come from, it is worth taking a closer look at all the Palestinian Authority's official media … Until then, the Voice of Palestine will remain what it has become: a combatant—and therefore a legitimate target—in a painful, never-ending, low-intensity war.[51]

What's noteworthy is that Applebaum never bothered to launder her promotion of the execution of Palestinian media workers in the language of "terrorism" or "material support for terrorism"—she is simply lobbying Israel to kill Palestinian media workers for the *mere fact that they are making Israel and the US look bad.* In the article, Applebaum argues that publishing a cartoon depicting George W. Bush as a warmonger makes Palestinian media a legitimate target worthy of summary killing. "Anti-Americanism," one is led to believe, is not only a form of racism but a mode of speech

that strips a journalist of their protected civilian status. This is an extraordinary, illiberal, and racist opinion, yet Applebaum was, and currently still is, allowed to remain in good standing among liberal and academic elites because Palestinians and Arabs simply don't register in the "student safety" calculus.

Imagine a Columbia professor or Pulitzer Prize committee member advocating the summary killing of Israeli media workers because they undermined the cause of Palestinian liberation in their reporting. If this article surfaced, it would stir up immediate outrage and condemnation, the academic in question would be quickly fired, apologies would be issued, and new policies would be promised. But with Applebaum calling for the killing of Palestinian reporters, an article that went semi-viral on social media every few months, no one in power seemed to care. Nothing happened. It was just another routine, normal *Serious Foreign Policy* opinion.

As a result of this selective and cynical "campus antisemitism" panic, universities, under pressure from donors and pro-Israel lobbying groups, rushed to publish cooked-up reports confirming this alleged crisis of antisemitism on campus. One such report pushed out by Harvard in April 2025 was denounced by an Israeli-American academic heavily featured in the report as an example of anti-Jewish bias. "[The report] claims to document a crisis of antisemitism on campus," Professor Atalia Omer wrote in the *Guardian*:[52]

> but what it actually reveals is Harvard's willingness to redefine Jewish identity in narrow, ideological terms: to exclude and erase Jews who dissent from Zionism. I know this because I am one of them. For several years, I taught in the Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative (RCPI) at Harvard Divinity School. Our program approached peacebuilding through deep engagement with histories of structural violence and power, with Palestine/Israel as our central case study. Our students read widely, traveled to the region, and met with a range of voices—including Jewish Israeli veterans from Breaking the Silence, Palestinian artists resisting

cultural erasure, and Mizrahi and Ethiopian Jewish activists challenging racism within Israeli society.

This selective framing is neither accidental nor a one-off act of malice. It reflects a broader pattern: Harvard's decision in January of this year to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, which conflates criticism of Israeli policies with antisemitism itself. In doing so, the university has not only taken steps to further suppress important political and ethical speech that confronts the reality of Israeli violence against Palestinians; it also effectively embraced a political litmus test for who counts as a legitimate Jew on campus. It's clear that I'm the "wrong kind of Jew" at Harvard. At each juncture, my academic and political commitments placed me outside the bounds of acceptability. I was too critical, too engaged, too willing to challenge dominant narratives. And I am far from the only one.

The central question for those genuinely concerned with antisemitism and how to combat it is: could the "campus antisemitism" narrative survive a total decoupling of overt pro-Israel activity from Jewish religious and cultural activity? Would bifurcating these two currents result in the same data that supposedly showed a massive uptick in anti-Jewish bias? The answer is, of course, not at all. Which is why—in addition to advancing the highly contested Zionist narrative that supporting Israel is inseparable from Jewish identity—it was necessary to do so. Without it, there isn't any there.

And more to the point, even if one accepts that it was a genuine narrative in urgent need of addressing with new campus policies and laws, it's *still* comparable to anti-Muslim, Islamophobic attacks and harassment, which received only 1.5 percent as much of the print media coverage and only 9 percent as much of cable news coverage. And when it was mentioned, it was almost always liberal box-ticking, buried in a "to be sure" paragraph, or a throw-away line. It was not a narrative, much less a moral crisis in urgent need of firings, denial of college degrees, and hundreds of arrests and deportations. This doesn't even factor in the hundreds of thousands of starving,

dying, maimed people in Gaza, for whom the whole moral panic was designed to distract and trivialize, and whose suffering and killing it sought to implicitly justify.

9

The *Atlantic*, "day after" wish-casting, and soft-pedaling mass killing for the tote bag set

I have discussed at length how the White House, Israel, and its allies used Center-Left media to shape the Gaza narrative for lawmakers, party elites, other newsmakers, and liberals more broadly. But when it comes to shaping specifically elite liberal opinion, the *Atlantic* magazine is in a different tier and operates in a different way. The *Atlantic* is most influential with liberals who are high-income and high status. It traffics in the pseudo-academic think-tank world and gets very prestigious writers to fill its masthead. The *Atlantic* has the veneer of sobriety and intelligence; it's the place you go for the 30,000-foot-high perspective. It has officialdom, it has tastemakers, it has thought leaders and, above all, it's perceived as *a guiding light of American liberalism*.

In this chapter, we will focus on how high-concept arguments were pushed out to elite political tastemakers via the *Atlantic* and, additionally, the *New York Times*' David Leonhardt's popular daily newsletter, which operates in a similar milieu. In addition to the Liberal Ceasefire Theater laid out in Chapter 3, the *Atlantic* and Leonhardt were on the forefront of achieving two related but distinct ideological objectives: (1) immediately and urgently pushing the concept of a ceasefire outside the realm of Seriousness, and (2) downplaying the soaring death count and lending credibility to Gaza death count denialism, or what we call Liberal Pallywood-ism.

THE *ATLANTIC* AND THE IMPORTANCE OF POLICING SERIOUSNESS

Thus far in our analysis, we have made little mention of the *Atlantic*, but its critical role in defending and opening up ideological and political space for the genocide in Gaza cannot be overstated. The *Atlantic*'s editor-in-chief, Jeffrey Goldberg, a former IDF prison guard, who openly admits to assisting in the torture of Palestinian prisoners during his jaunt into elective Zionist militarism in the late 1980s and early 1990s,[1] shaped an opinion and reporting output that—with very rare exception—reinforced every premise of the genocide, especially in its early, critical weeks. An analysis of the *Atlantic*'s output from October 7, 2023, to December 7, 2023, the first 60 days, shows that of the 134 articles the *Atlantic* published about Gaza, 58 were explicitly in favor of Israel's attack on Gaza, 64 were indexed as neutral or unclear, and only three could be read as opposing Israel's attack on Gaza. None of the three anti-attack pieces called for a permanent and lasting ceasefire, though one—"The Cost of War Will Be Counted in Children's Lives" (10/26/23) by Catherine Russell,[2] the executive director of UNICEF—did call for a "humanitarian ceasefire," which was DC-speak at the time for a temporary pause in fighting, followed by continued bombing after some amount of aid was let in.

The other two anti-attack pieces—"Israel's Dangerous Delusion" by Hussein Ibish (November 1, 2023)[3] and "I Was a Child in a War" by Bushra Seddique (October 24, 2023)[4]—were fine enough. But unlike their dozens of pro-attack counterparts, they lacked any clear demands. The former provided the only sustained questioning of the logic of Israel's war, albeit in detached think-tank tones, and the latter was a broad warning about "war's" impact on children—a genre of reportage the *Atlantic* would publish from time to time—but, as laid out in Chapter 4, almost always involves treating the subject matter is if it were a *Natural Disaster*. Indeed, Claire Porter Robbins' dispatch about pregnancy and childbirth in Gaza, "Giving Birth in Gaza," from December 2, 2023,[5] somehow manages to discuss the devastating impacts of Israel's bombing and siege on pregnant

women without mentioning "Israel"—or any related terms—once. The bombs, once again, come from no one and nowhere.

"Is Israel at War With Iran?" (October 8, 2023) by Arash Azizi,[6] published less than a day after the attack, did vaguely call for a "ceasefire." ("We can only hope that responsible actors in the region and beyond can bring about a cease-fire.") But this aspirational appeal was buried under several paragraphs propping up the basic premise of Israel's assault on Gaza, including unsubstantiated claims that Iran had prior knowledge or a role in October 7. "The operation, whatever its details, must have taken months of preparation, and Hamas would almost certainly not simply surprise Tehran with something on this scale. Some coordination seems the very minimum," the piece says, a claim we now know to be false,[7] at least according to US intelligence officials.

These token examples of dissent aside, Goldberg's specific brand of liberal Zionist ideological output could be seen in the *Atlantic*'s consistent opposition to the basic premise of a ceasefire. In the early months of Israel's attack on Gaza, the *Atlantic* published atrocity propaganda referenced in Chapter 1: On October 12, 2023, Gal Beckerman twice platformed the "beheaded babies" lie, a claim the *Atlantic* still refuses to retract.[8] The publication also purveyed openly racist "clash of civilizations" missives, and dozens of articles embracing the "an attack on Jews rather than Israelis" sectarian framing. In addition to this, the *Atlantic* published a half dozen articles explicitly opposing a ceasefire in Gaza and deriding the idea as out of the scope of *Serious Opinion*.

"I Don't See a Better Way Out," wrote Ned Lazarus on October 24, 2023,[9] in a typically smug early example of the genre. "I envy those who know exactly how Hamas can be stopped without any more killing, because I don't," read the sub-headline. The premise that Hamas ought to be "stopped" regardless of how many Palestinian children must be killed to do so never entered into the calculus. As per usual with the genre, it's simply taken for granted that Israel's "security" is paramount over all other considerations and that it cannot be achieved through a political process, but only bombs and starvation. "[Hamas] does not appear to care about the harms

inflicted on Palestinian civilians—indeed, it gives every indication that it welcomes them," Eliot A. Cohen wrote on November 1, 2023.[10] Cohen, a former Bush official and founding member of the Project for the New American Century (the think-tank most widely credited with pushing the US to invade Iraq in 2003), made clear: "[Hamas'] eschatological ambitions mean that any compromise or ceasefire is temporary and purely instrumental."

"Why a Gaza Cease-Fire Is Unrealistic," read another November 8, 2023, headline from Daniel Kurtzer,[11] a former US ambassador to Israel and a professor at Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs. "What sounds simple and obvious rests on conditions that are almost impossible to meet," Kurtzer insists, ostensibly *With a Heavy Heart*. The article would go on to make the bizarre claim that Palestinian militants may not approve of a ceasefire, despite this being untrue based on every mainstream report at the time. But it didn't need to be factually accurate; it just needed to serve its primary ideological objective, which was to wave away the increasingly loud calls for a ceasefire.

"Hamas Must Go," said Hillary Rodham Clinton in simplistic terms on November 14, 2023.[12] "The terror group has proved again and again that it will sabotage any efforts to forge a lasting peace," the former Secretary of State added. After liberal box-checking about how her heart bled for Palestinians in Gaza ("My decades of experience in the region taught me that Palestinian and Israeli parents may say different prayers at worship but they share the same hopes for their kids"), she proceeded to assert the glib, seemingly anodyne premise that "Hamas must go … They have proved again and again that they will not abide by cease-fires, will sabotage any efforts to forge a lasting peace, and will never stop attacking Israel."

Hamas must go? Okay. Simple enough, it seems. "A Moral Case Against the Israeli Hostage Deal," staff writer and Yale professor Graeme Wood wrote on November 22, 2023,[13] after a temporary pause in fighting between Hamas and Israel was announced. Wood, echoing the rhetoric of Israel's Far-Right, argued that the temporary pause "rewarded hostage-taking" (without, of course, noting Israel maintains thousands of Palestinian captives in its torture-

filled prisons). The piece was wrapped in a convoluted analogy to Frederick Douglass buying slaves' freedom—apparently, prisoner swaps with Hamas presented a similar moral hazard. In platonic *Atlantic* magazine form, Wood promotes an obscene, callous pro-war argument in the highbrow trappings of a liberal abolitionist tradition.

Wood would explicitly oppose a ceasefire again in January 2024, this time shifting the burden to Hamas. "Hamas Doesn't Want a Cease-Fire: It Wants the War to Expand,"[14] Wood writes without a hint of irony or mentioning that he, in these very pages, argued against a ceasefire just six weeks prior. Taking a faux-savvy approach to the topic, Wood (whose blasé defense of Israel's child-killing we'll get to later) tells the *Atlantic*'s sophisticated readership that Hamas, in fact, doesn't actually want a ceasefire. "What good would a cease-fire do Hamas now?" he writes with unjustified certainty and contrary to all available facts showing that Hamas had been seeking to enter a ceasefire immediately after October 7, 2023.

> The brutality of the Gaza invasion has left Israel largely friendless, or at least with its few remaining friends publicly urging restraint. Hamas has friends too, and it very much wants them to join in … A cease-fire is the opposite of Hamas's goal. It wants the war to expand, and there is some evidence that its wish will be granted.[15]

But this made no sense, and has been contradicted by both reports at the time and subsequent reporting on Netanyahu's refusal to exchange captives for a lasting ceasefire.

But none of this really mattered. The nominal reasoning—*a ceasefire is impossible*, *a ceasefire is inadvisable*, *Hamas doesn't actually want a ceasefire*, *a ceasefire is like buying slaves*—is irrelevant. The point was *to remove calls for a ceasefire from the realm of seriousness*. The *Atlantic* is a *Serious* magazine with *Serious* people writing for it—academics with long resumes, former top government officials, people with Pulitzers and Aspen Institute and RFK Center awards. Obviously, if they have all seemingly reached the conclusion that the US pressuring Israel to end its military campaign is pie-in-the-sky,

Far-Left daydreaming. Therefore, it was not an opinion worthy of consideration, much less adoption.

Obvious problems with this premise remained almost largely unaddressed in the pages of the *Atlantic*. What does it mean to say "Hamas must go?" Traditionally, guerrilla armies with sufficient popular support can't be "defeated" in any meaningful sense—a premise later affirmed by military experts and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.[16] What of Israeli officials' several genocidal statements and openly genocidal plans for Gaza? What of the thousands of children already killed? What of the underlying conditions that led to October 7, namely the siege, dispossession and occupation of Gaza and the West Bank? Don't they matter in this calculus? All serious moral considerations, but because they mess up Jeffrey Goldberg's simplistic War on Terror narrative, they're unworthy of the pages of his *Serious* publication.

In addition to rushing out a torrent of takes trying to convince liberals—wary of the carnage streaming on their social media timelines—that a ceasefire was either a *Non Sequitur* or Deeply Unserious, the *Atlantic*, like other Center-Left media, enthusiastically took part in the instant *ISIS-fication* of Hamas. They did so sometimes by publishing outright racist screeds, like another piece by Eliot A. Cohen—"Against Barbarism"—that ran on October 12, 2023.[17] In the article, Cohen argues that Americans had spent the last two decades fighting "barbarians in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan," then states that Israel's fight in Gaza was a fight against "barbarism."

"Barbarians fight because they enjoy violence. They do not only kill and maim—the armies of civilized states do that all the time—but go out of their way to inflict pain, to torture, to rape, and above all to humiliate. They exult in their enemies' suffering. That is why they like taking pictures of their weeping, terrified victims; why they make videos of slow beheadings; and why they dance around mutilated corpses."

"[Hamas]'s violence was rooted not in strategy, but in sadism," wrote Yair Rosenberg.[18] Wood, while noting the theological differences between ISIS and Hamas in a separate article,[19] still made sure to classify the group as an ontological evil with whom negotiations

were futile. October 7 was "pure, predatory sadism,"[20] he wrote after watching the IDF-sponsored videos from the day of the attack. "The depths of Hamas's sadism," wrote Michael A. Cohen, adding to the chorus of neat moral indexing, "are almost too sickening to comprehend."[21]

Calls for a ceasefire, the *Atlantic* continually told its elite liberal readership, were not only Unserious but morally repugnant. How could anyone enter into a ceasefire with a group that was run by blood thirsty fanatics who, in the event a ceasefire might be reached, would immediately "go back to killing Jews" for pure sadistic glee?

EXCLUDING PALESTINIAN VOICES—UNLESS THEY BROADLY REFLECT JEFFREY GOLDBERG'S POINT OF VIEW

After having a single token Palestinian write about Gaza for the first month of Israel's assault,[22] Goldberg and the *Atlantic*'s editorial team eventually found a handful of Palestinian voices who would largely reflect the *Atlantic*'s liberal Zionist line. Chief among them were British-Palestinian writer John Aziz, founder of the American Task Force on Palestine Ziad Asali, and Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib, a fellow at the pro-US, US-funded think-tank Atlantic Council. Their output called for a two-state solution in vague terms and/or propped up every nominal justification for the war, namely the "Hamas could not remain in power" axiom central to all of the *Atlantic*'s late 2023 and early 2024 output. None of these writers ever called for a ceasefire prior to the White House-driven definition change and nominal support for one in February 2024—despite this being the overwhelming position of Palestinian civil society.

> During the most promising years of the Oslo Peace Accords, the Palestine Liberation Organization, Fatah, and the Palestinian Authority courageously acknowledged the need for peaceful coexistence with Israel as a Jewish nation. Hamas, however, not only eroded Israeli support for the peace process with its suicide bombings and violence during the 1990s and the early years of the Second Intifada.

Alkhatib wrote in a typical article from February 2024,[23] "it also made belief in the peace process seem toxic, unpopular, treacherous, and cowardly among Palestinians. Through its horrendous yet skillfully executed violence, Hamas instead injected new life into the resistance narrative, which promoted a perpetual armed struggle to liberate all of Palestine."

"I've always felt like a part of the Palestinian community,"[24] John Aziz wrote on November 8, 2023, reflecting the liberal Zionist line of his editor. "But as I heard the responses of so many Palestinians to Hamas' brutal attack on Israel last month, I felt alone … Where were the Palestinian voices condemning Hamas, expressing solidarity with the victims, and demanding the release of the Israelis who were kidnapped?" As the bodies piled up in Gaza by the thousands, the *Atlantic* thought the most morally urgent intervention Palestinians could make was not to demand a ceasefire, but to demand other Palestinians "condemn Hamas."

"The Israelis aren't leaving, and neither are the Palestinians. Israel exists, no matter what Hamas might want," Ziad Asali wrote on November 4, 2023, in his essay "My Message of Peace."[25] A seemingly benign essay—but one that, again, reinforces the general premise of liberal Zionism. Palestinians could be critical of Israeli tactics in the *Atlantic*, and even touch on the humanity of Palestinians, but they had to ultimately reinforce central pillars of Goldberg's worldview, as Alkhatib did when he name-checked "Israel's legitimate security needs."[26] In a later article,[27] he laments Hamas' "ruthless disregard for its own people's well-being" and says the "Islamist terror group appears solely focused on its operational and tactical survival, regardless of the strategic consequences of its actions or the damage it inflicts on the Palestinian cause." Or when Alkhatib argued in March 2025[28] that the "so-called pro-Palestine movement has no space for a Palestinian who opposes Hamas' terrorism and promotes a future of coexistence with Israelis."

This is not, of course, to say that Palestinians cannot be anti-Hamas: Aziz, Asali, and Alkhatib obviously represent an authentic perspective among Palestinians. Clearly, Hamas' October 7 attack and its strategy of national liberation is polarizing among Palestin-

ians in Gaza—a dynamic supported by multiple polls. But it's useful to note that the only Palestinians the *Atlantic* would platform to produce ideological content had to repeatedly reaffirm the basic tenets of liberal Zionism without any explicit calls for a ceasefire or the ability to characterize Israel's assault on Gaza as anything other than a genuine "war on Hamas"—despite mounds of contemporary evidence, laid out in Chapter 2, that the so-called "war on Hamas" was wholly a pretext.

The *Atlantic* did run a smattering of pieces by other Palestinians. NPR's Rund Abdelfatah wrote a beautiful essay in November 2023,[29] but it was more lament than outrage, much less a call to action for a ceasefire. The *Atlantic* also checked the box by publishing two pieces from Palestinian-American poet Andrew Calis[30] and a poem from Mosab Abu Toha.[31] While their work is powerful in its own right, poetry is in a different category of writing that, in this case, is more lyrical and high-level, and not directly dispelling the political arguments that proliferate in the magazine. This is not a criticism of the poems, but to say this does not count as a one-to-one takedown of a liberal Zionist line.

Overall, the *Atlantic* saw no need to rally around any specific moral outrages. In a year of post-October 7 coverage, the *Atlantic* made no mention of Hind Rajab, the 5-year-old Palestinian girl murdered by the IDF, along with six of her family members and two paramedics, mentioned in the previous chapter. It made no mention of the IDF's execution of prominent writer Refaat Alareer, killed on December 6, 2023, by an Israeli airstrike on his home in Northern Gaza, along with his brother, sister, and four of his nephews. It made no mention, despite the *Atlantic's* supposed commitment to "covering threats to free expression,"[32] of the scores of journalists Israel killed in Gaza. A review of the *Atlantic*'s Gaza coverage shows a publication overwhelmingly unconcerned with the human costs of the "war" they so aggressively supported. And when the costs were written about, Israel's responsibility was either buried or left entirely unmentioned. And they were even less concerned with any particular moral outrage that could be perceived as a rallying cry to end the horrors. Despite not uttering the names "Hind Rajab" or

"Refaat Alareer" once, or mentioning the unprecedented death toll of journalists in Gaza, they did manage to run 83 different articles critical of campus Gaza protests and 29 different articles on the pseudo-scandal around Harvard president Claudine Gay in the first year—a dual media obsession we detailed in Chapter 8.

In his 2024 book, *The Message*, author Ta-Nehisi Coates writes a *mea culpa* for his role at the *Atlantic* in uncritically participating in the dehumanization of Palestinians.[33] From 2008 to 2018, Coates was a writer and then national correspondent for the *Atlantic*. During this tenure, he was widely acclaimed for a number of long, lyrical, reported essays about racial injustice in America. Best known among them was an article he wrote in 2014, "The Case for Reparations."[34] In that piece, he made the compelling case that African Americans are owed reparations for their systematic dispossession, ongoing in today's housing policies. Coates cited German reparations to Israel as one model to draw from, something he went on to express regret for in *The Message*. "Within days of publishing 'The Case for Reparations,' I began to feel the mistake," he wrote. "But it took years for the depth of that mistake, and thus my own debt, to compound."

A visit to the West Bank caused Coates to deeply question, and publicly apologize for, his failure to grapple with Israel's injustices against Palestinians. He wrote:

> If the language I'd heard all my professional life had been wrong, had been deceptive even, then what was the language to describe the project I now saw? It's true that "Jim Crow" was the first thing that came to mind, if only because "Jim Crow" is a phrase that connotes an injustice, a sorting of human beings, the awarding and tripping of the rights of a population. Certainly, that was some part of what I saw in Hebron, in Jerusalem, in Lydd.

In *The Message*, Coates reflects on how he, a critical and deeply thoughtful writer on racial injustice in America, could have overlooked this injustice. Though he doesn't name names, he does grapple with the structural forces at work. "I thought I could stand

apart, but looking back, I see that the parts of my thinking that were most reinforced were those that dovetailed with those around me, and the parts that were the hardest to hold were those that did not," he wrote.

> I wrote a lot of stuff I came to regret—a lot of smart-ass contrarianism, a lot of mean prose—in the young rush to get into the paper or magazine. And even after I matured, I found that my old instincts had not. I became a better technical writer, but my sense of the world was stunted. There were no Palestinian writers or editors around me. But there were many writers, editors, and publishers who believed in the nobility of Zionism and had little regard for, or simply could not see, its victims.

While Coates did not work at the *Atlantic* during or after October 7, the implicit and explicit pressure to toe the pro-Israel line remains the same today as it did during his tenure, a fact reflected in any cursory survey of their post-October 7 output. Repeating Zionist clichés is rewarded, challenging the Israeli narrative is either disciplined or ignored altogether, and Palestinians are only allowed to speak when they either ignore or do not meaningfully challenge liberal support for Israel's destruction of Gaza.

LIBERAL PALLYWOOD-ISM AND THE CASTING OF DOUBT ON PALESTINIAN DEATH FIGURES

As noted in the introduction to this book, the pro-Israel right has long engaged in a racist conspiracy theory that Palestinians stage or fake their own suffering, deaths, and injuries to garner Western support and "blood libel Jews" in performances callously referred to as "Pallywood." In just one example, mainstream Israeli news outlet the *Jerusalem Post* published an article accusing Palestinian journalist Ali Jadallah of posting an image of a "doll" and lying that the doll was a 5-month-old baby killed in an Israeli airstrike.[35] The image was, of course, a real photo showing one of the over 5,000 babies Israel had exterminated or would go on to exterminate—in this

instance, Muhammad Hani Al-Zahar, who was killed in an Israeli airstrike on December 1, 2023. After Jadallah and other Western media outlets called out the *Jerusalem Post* for its slander, the Post took the piece offline, and its editor, Avi Meyer, quietly left his position. While this is a rare case of vulgar Pallywood-ism making its way into mainstream press, a softer, less falsifiable—but much higher leverage—version of this trope time and again found its way into Center-Left media.

Casting vague aspersions on the ballooning death counts coming out of Gaza was a routine practice in US media in the early weeks of the genocide, with the president of the United States himself leading the charge. In a move that shocked even already-jaded Biden critics for its raw credulity, President Biden said on October 25, 2023, when asked by reporters what the US planned to do to reduce the number of civilian casualties in Gaza, "I have no notion if Palestinians are telling the truth about how many people are killed. I'm sure innocents have been killed, and it is the price of waging war. But I have no confidence in the number that Palestinians are using."[36]

As the Associated Press noted at the time, the Gaza Ministry of Health's figures from previous conflicts had generally aligned with numbers provided by both the Israeli government and the United Nations.[37] And, as noted in Chapter 2, the US State Department itself has long considered the numbers reliable. Biden reportedly later apologized for these comments in a private meeting in November 2023 with "Muslim community leaders" when lobbying for their support, but he never did so publicly.[38] Nor did anyone in the White House ever acknowledge the lie or attempt to correct it for the record.

But with the president leading the way, it was open season on casting doubt on the obscene death totals emerging from Gaza. In addition to the widespread adoption of the "Hamas-run" label after the Al-Ahli Hospital bombing on October 17 (discussed in Chapter 2), which subtly institutionalized Liberal Pallywood-ism, soft death count denial would find support in mainstream circles. "Hamas has a clear propaganda incentive to inflate civilian casualties as much as possible," former Reuters bureau chief Luke Baker

said in a since-deleted post on Twitter/X.[39] Baker, who was in charge of Reuters' Israel–Palestine coverage from 2014 to 2017, would go on to add, "Any health official stepping out of line and not giving the death tolls that Hamas wants reported to journalists risks serious consequences."

The most egregious example would come in May 2024, when the *Atlantic*'s Graeme Wood published an article[40] charging that death toll statistics being used by the United Nations "make no sense." The article took aim at what was then a recent change to how the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) counts women and children killed by Israel in Gaza. OCHA said on May 6 that Israel had killed at least 9,500 women and 14,500 children, and then on May 8 put this number at 4,959 women and 7,797 children.

The downward revision, Wood asserted, using tabloid innuendo, was evidence that the UN is compromised, and somehow needed to come clean. To buttress his point Wood cited a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), a notorious right-wing pro-Israel organization posing as a neutral, sober "think-tank." (FDD was set up in April 2001 by major pro-Israel donors incorporated under the name called EMET, Hebrew for "truth," and their mission, according to their IRS application, "was to provide education to enhance Israel's image in North America.") "This is one of those moments," Wood wrote,

> when the fog of statistics could be dispersed with just a few sentences of straight talk, of the sort rarely uttered by spokespeople. The UN numbers changed because the UN has little idea how many children have been killed in Gaza, beyond "a lot." It gets its statistics from Hamas. Where else would it get them? There are no independent epidemiologists in Gaza right now doing the survey work, house to bombed-out house, that would yield reliable numbers. So OCHA used unreliable ones.

But the UN did explain itself. In a May 14 article that ran in *Haaretz*,[41] UN spokesperson Farhan Haq is quoted as telling the press in New

York that the UN had modified the numbers to reflect the 24,686 people "who have fully been identified." He explained, "There's about another 10,000 plus bodies who still have to be fully identified, and so then the details of those—which of those are children, which of those are women—that will be re-established once the full identification process is complete."

The *Haaretz* article noted that the UN had been transparent in the past about its inability to firsthand confirm death tolls. "In all previous reports by the UN, the tallies were attributed to authorities in Gaza, with a note that UN personnel in Gaza were unable to independently verify the count because of the war," the article says. This didn't stop Wood from doing exactly what he set out to do: paint open and transparent methodological adjustment in the middle of the worst humanitarian crisis in modern history as something nefarious and conspiratorial. A separate Reuters article published that same day quoted WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier at a press conference in Geneva. "Nothing [is] wrong with the data, the overall data (more than 35,000 dead) are still the same," he said.[42] "The fact we now have 25,000 identified people is a step forward." "He added that it was 'normal' for death tolls to shift in conflicts, recalling that Israel had revised down its own death toll from the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks to 1,200 [down from 1,400, a reduction of 14.2 percent] after checks," the article states.

In case the reader is still unclear about why the statistics used by OSHA shifted, Feroze Sidhwa, a trauma and critical care surgeon who has done multiple medical humanitarian trips to Gaza, spelled it out in an article for *Common Dreams*.[43] He wrote:

> When someone's identity can be fully verified they are moved from the unidentified database to the identified database, and then they are reported in the total number of people killed and in the subcategory that they fall into: man, woman, child, elderly. If they cannot be fully identified then they stay in the unidentified database and are included in the overall count but not in the subcategories. For anybody who has ever looked at a spreadsheet there is nothing complicated or confusing about this."

But for Wood, this reasonable revision on the part of OCHA was evidence that something was a foul: the lurid headline, the whiff of cover-up. Curiously, he does not seem to contest in the article that the Palestinian death toll is tremendous, or that children are being killed, but by raising suspicion, he vaguely casts doubt on the numbers. The effect is to weaken them as a data point, without disproving them. "The whole exercise of asking whether these numbers are accurate is just distraction and obfuscation," notes Sidhwa. This is especially troubling because numbers from Gaza's Health Ministry are widely accepted as accurate,[44] and the real death toll, numerous subsequent studies have confirmed, is much higher than official numbers, especially when considering indirect causes of death.[45]

But Wood, ultimately, was more concerned about the PR problem the episode presented for Israel. "Operating a statistics laundromat for Hamas' media wing is embarrassing," he writes. "But the absence of alternatives is also concerning. Any indictment of OCHA's numbers should propose better sources for numbers—and, in their absence, ask why there aren't any." Wood writes breathlessly, "Its media operations in this war will be remembered as a historic failure that allowed Hamas' propaganda to be accepted and spread almost without rebuttal."

The problem was not that Palestinians were being killed in large numbers in asymmetrical warfare waged by a vastly superior military power. The problem was not that children were being crushed to death while they slept in their beds, or lost forever beneath the rubble that used to be their homes. Rather, Wood was concerned that Israel needed a lesson in media relations, which he provided—free of charge. Wood suggests that Israel ought to invite reporters to embed with its military, a tactic that was widely used by the US in the Iraq war to drum up support for American troops, who were shown intimately as they fight for their lives against an enemy that is not equally humanized. "To rebut Hamas' allegations by letting journalists see the war up close would be a calculated risk. Even when conducted legally, war is ugly. It is possible to kill children legally, if, for example, one is being attacked by an enemy who hides behind them. But the sight of a legally killed child is no less disturb-

ing than the sight of a murdered one. And Israel has discovered that shutting out the press carries its own risks. An infanticide that no one can see is also going to attract suspicion."

Wood apparently believes the PR problem caused by Israel's supposedly justified infanticide is the issue, not the fact of infanticide itself. It's an obscene display of runaway callousness, racism, and chauvinist ideological blinders posing as sober analysis. The real goal wasn't to inquire about the reliability of death tolls (indeed, Wood never wrote about the subject ever again), but to use the words "Hamas" and "UN" as many times as possible and indulge Liberal Pallywood-ism using innuendo and misleading headlines. All to give the *Atlantic*'s liberal readership the vague, and self-soothing impression that the UN is compromised and the alarmingly large death tolls should be considered suspect—and thus not something of particularly moral import.

The purpose, again, was to soothe, and make liberals—whose institutions and president were arming and funding mass death before their very eyes—feel better about themselves. To compartmentalize, scroll past, and index as sad, but not something anyone in the West could really do anything to stop. It didn't matter if the analysis was sloppy, disingenuous, and openly ideological. The objective was to neutralize outrage, lending a veneer of respectability and Ivy League gloss to what was little more than third-rate genocide denial.

THE MOVE ALONG, NOTHING TO SEE HERE INTERVENTION, AND HOW TO HANDWAVE AWAY GENOCIDAL RHETORIC FROM ISRAELI OFFICIALS AS LOCKER ROOM TALK

Central to its role of blunting liberal outrage over the brutal carnage emanating from Gaza, the *Atlantic* published three interventions in late 2023 and early 2024 downplaying, dismissing, or otherwise handwaving away concerns over overt genocidal statements from Israeli officials. One was by Harvard Law School professor Noah Feldman ("The Word Genocide Has An Actual Meaning"—

November 15, 2023),[46] and two were by *Atlantic* columnist Yair Rosenberg ("What Did Top Israeli War Officials Really Say About Gaza?"—January 21, 2024;[47] "How to Win an Argument but Lose the Plot"—February 5, 2024).[48] Like most of their Gaza output, the goal was to create sharable, seemingly academic explainers the *Atlantic*'s wealthy subscriber base could pass along to friends and family to counter increased worries that Israel was engaged in a campaign of mass killing and destruction, rather than a limited "war on Hamas," a charge made all the more urgent after the UN International Court of Justice's January 26, 2024 ruling that Israel was committing "plausible" genocide in Gaza[49] based, in part, on the myriad genocidal statements made by Israeli officials.

By the time these articles were being pushed out by the *Atlantic*, writers attempting to downplay Israel's genocidal intent had their work cut out for them. In addition to the scores of genocidal statements made by Israeli officials up to that point, top officials such as Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, Israeli President Isaac Herzog, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were openly calling for collective punishment and ethnic cleansing.

The first Move Along, Nothing to See Here essay came from Harvard Law School professor Noah Feldman on November 15, 2023. It attempted to downplay openly genocidal statements using "Well, Actually" technical arguments and an apparent ability to read the minds of Israeli officials. "Israel has declared the war objective of eliminating Hamas, which is a military-political organization, not a whole people," Feldman said with feigned credulity.

> Statements by Israeli officials that describe Hamas terrorists as 'human animals' could be proffered to suggest that Israel is dehumanizing Palestinians with the intent to destroy the Palestinian people. But the repugnant expression has, at least in statements of government officials, been directed at Hamas, rather than all Palestinians—a distinction that would make a great difference as a matter of law. Israel's conduct toward the Palestinian population in Gaza and elsewhere does not, in my view, manifest an intent to destroy the Palestinian people, in whole or in part. Those

> Israelis who openly seek to 'transfer'—that is, expel—Palestinians by force from Israel or the West Bank or Gaza are advocating a morally reprehensible policy that would violate international law, which prohibits such forced deportations. They are not necessarily advocating genocide as defined legally.

Don't worry, Feldman assures skeptical *Atlantic* readers, expelling Palestinians from Gaza does not meet the definition of "destroying the Palestinian people, in whole or in part." Why? Feldman doesn't say; he just moves on, culminating in a final paragraph soon after, handwringing about how "the language of conflict can be a source of conflict."

What does any of this mean? It doesn't mean anything. The point isn't to convince the reader with good-faith logic; it's to have a *Very Serious Harvard Law Professor* in a *Very Serious* magazine say that what's going on in Gaza isn't genocide, so people supporting the genocide can share it among themselves to rationalize their objectively violent and cruel political position.

After the ICJ's ruling, the urgency to downplay Israel's long list of genocidal comments became all the more urgent since these statements were central to the argument that Israel wasn't engaged in a "war on Hamas" but had more sinister plans. The writer tasked with "debunking" these worries was the *Atlantic*'s resistant liberal Zionist spinster, Yair Rosenberg. In his two articles on the subject ("What Did Top Israeli War Officials Really Say About Gaza?" from January 21, 2024 and "How to Win an Argument but Lose the Plot" from February 5, 2024), he used a combination of highly selective fact-checking, literal-minded technicalities and like Feldman before him, feigned credulity and mind-reading to blow off concerns that the patently genocidal statements Israeli officials were making should color how one perceived the alleged "war on Hamas."

Like Feldman, Rosenberg insisted that the "human animals" comment by Defense Minister Gallant was "stripped of essential context" because Gallant was talking about "Hamas," "not Gaza or Gazans." As it happens, this excuse is the exact same defense used by Hutu propagandists, namely those running Radio Télévision Libre

des Mille Collines, when they were put on trial by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda for their role in fueling the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994.

"[The Hutu propagandists] defence," the BBC reported in 2003, "relied on the often ambiguous nature of the comments—which they say were aimed at the advancing Tutsi rebels under General Paul Kagame rather than at civilians."[50]

It is obvious that in the context of the heightened genocidal fervor in Israel post-October 7, the distinction between technically referring to a military enemy (if you believe this was the case) versus a civilian population as "human animals" is effectively meaningless. Indeed, it's not a defense that the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda found very convincing for just this reason.

Rosenberg also dismisses claims that Netanyahu, citing Amalek in his October 28 speech, which heavily implied support for the killing of civilians, was genocidal because "the biblical story he cites about Amalek with a completely different one in another book of the Bible that takes place hundreds of years later. The verse from Deuteronomy that the Israeli leader quoted—which is explicitly cited in the official translation of his speech—recounts the time of Moses. Netanyahu's critics mistakenly attribute his words to the book of Samuel, in which King Saul is commanded to wipe out every member of Amalek, down to their children and livestock."

Once again, to Rosenberg, there is no such thing as a subtext, dog-whistles, or signaling: Netanyahu is presented as a *Simple Country Talmudic Scholar* who just so happened to be talking about the non-genocidal Amalek reference as Israel's invasion of Gaza got underway, and busybody leftwingers simply jumped to conclusions. Conspicuously, Rosenberg never bothered to defend President Herzog's comments from October 13, 2023, claiming, "It is an entire nation out there that is responsible," probably because, unlike Gallant and Netanyahu's comments, it was said in English and could be read and interpreted by American audiences without Rosenberg's attempts to mystify and obscure. Indeed, Rosenberg ignores several other genocidal comments—from National Security Minister Ben-Gvir's proclamation that anyone who supports Hamas should be

"eliminated," to Agriculture and Food Security Minister Avi Dichter telling Channel 12, "We are now rolling out the Gaza Nakba." This is most likely because they couldn't be nickel-and-dimed with his literal-minded Debate Kid routine.

Yair Rosenberg's broader role at the *Atlantic* was to defend an increasingly discredited and dubious liberal Zionist framework for Israel's genocide in Gaza. His output consisted mostly of jumping on social media every day and attempting to distance Biden and liberals in Israel from the more explicit genocidal acts and statements of the Israeli government. The implication being, *There's no need to exert pressure on Israel via arms embargo or sanctions, because the country was always about to have a liberal awakening that would usher in a more humane "war on Hamas."* Alas, such an eventuality never came to pass, and all of the openly genocidal statements Rosenberg dismissed as unfair overreactions in early 2024—from mass displacement to starvation as a weapon of war—became open Israeli policy once Biden left office and the need for liberal window-dressing had passed.

It wasn't only the *Atlantic*. One *New York Times* article from November 15, 2023, "'Erase Gaza': War Unleashes Incendiary Rhetoric in Israel"[51] by Mark Landler finally noted in the paper of record "about 18,000" "inflammatory statements" by Israelis. That article played a similar, if more slippery, role of acknowledging the genocidal language emanating out of Israel, but largely downplayed it by not framing it as evidence of a plan by the Israeli government, but a hotheaded trauma response by a people gearing up for a long "war."

"Eran Halperin, a professor of psychology at Hebrew University in Jerusalem," Landler writes, "argued that the use of inflammatory language by Israeli leaders is not surprising, and even understandable, given the brutality of the Hamas attacks, which inflicted collective and individual trauma on Israelis."

At worst, the litany of genocidal statements the *New York Times* reported was creating a permission structure for excessive Palestinian deaths. But, more often the case, it was framed as a PR headache for Israel, which risked "isolating" itself "around the world." The

feelings of Jewish Israelis were centered entirely, and the article did not interview any Palestinians about how this type of rhetoric is used to justify killing, terrorizing, or removing them in whole or in part. Nor did the article use the words "genocidal" or "genocide" once. The reality of Israeli officials issuing dozens of genocidal statements had to be acknowledged by the *New York Times*, but it was folded into broader cultural trends and presented as blowing off steam rather than the open telegraphing of specific plans. Genocidal rhetoric could be vaguely "concerning," but could never, in and of itself, be evidence of genocidal intent.

The goal of this particular sub-genre of Move Along, Nothing to See Here reporting and punditry was to acknowledge the undeniable—that Israeli leaders and the society more broadly were making openly genocidal statements and plans on a daily basis—but reduce it to fringe behavior, some type of trauma response, mere locker room talk, or a mistranslation by Western audiences.

DAVID LEONHARDT AND THE FINE ART OF WONKISH GENOCIDE INCITEMENT

In the first year of the genocide, the *New York Times*' David Leonhardt, whose *The Morning* newsletter boasts 16.1 million subscribers and helps set the daily agenda for elite Democrats, rarely mentioned Gaza. And when he did, it was either to recite liberal Zionist mythologies, promote the *Third-Partying* narrative distancing Biden from the horrors, or downplay the Palestinian death count. Leonhardt's primary role was to repackage beltway conventional wisdom that asserted, without any critical examination or original thought, four central premises: (1) "Israel Had No Choice" but to "eliminate Hamas." (2) Hamas was a cartoon evil with no secular demands, alien to the broader Palestinian population and only using them as captive "human shields." (3) Israel was trying its best to "protect civilians." And (4) to the extent Israel "failed" to do so, Biden was effectively managing their excesses and was acting as a force of humanitarianism and moderation.

Leonhardt's "analysis," which was almost always just opinion and *ad hoc* ideological assertion, served to dampen any potential liberal outrage at the disturbing images coming out of Gaza, while providing the illusion of intellectual rigor—complete with charts, graphs, and alleged "experts" peppered throughout. The goal was never to challenge the *New York Times*' audiences, report uncomfortable truths, interrogate conventional wisdom, or complicate convenient narratives, but to pander to Western audiences' default prejudices, ignorance, partisan biases, and—above all—lower the temperature so Biden and Netanyahu could continue the genocide without any factoring in the blue wall of support.

In his third newsletter on the topic on October 13, 2023, Leonhardt and his co-author, Lauren Jackson, assured the *New York Times*' readers that "Israel's goals" were the simple, and seemingly anodyne aim of "preventing Hamas from being able to conduct more attacks and to reestablish the country's military credibility."[52] From the jump, Leonhardt would ignore genocidal comments coming from top Israeli officials in the immediate aftermath of October 7. He made no mention of Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's comments on October 9 that he had "ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we are acting accordingly."[53] The *New York Times*, as a rule, did not register these comments when determining Israel's motives, which were always said to be purely military, "targeted," and premised on self-defense. The pending high death count was preemptively handwaved away by Leonardt and blamed on Hamas:

> "It's almost inevitable that Israeli strikes on Hamas targets will hit or wound civilians," our colleague Steven Erlanger, who has covered the Middle East for years, said on *The Daily* this week. "And it's partly because Hamas deliberately lives among them and hides its munitions among them and in mosques and in hospitals. I've seen these things for myself. And I don't expect them to be any different this time."

Hamas "deliberately lives among" civilians, Leonhardt and Erlanger inform readers, unlike Israeli military personnel who presumably quarantine themselves from Israeli society and live in above-ground buildings clearly labeled "military target." Leonhardt's most overtly cynical intervention was his now-infamous January 22, 2024, article, "The Decline of Deaths in Gaza,"[54] where Leonhardt painted an alleged slight reduction in the *rate* of *reported* deaths as evidence of moral improvement and humanitarianism. "The daily death toll in Gaza has fallen in half over the past month, reflecting a change in war strategy," Leonhardt celebrated:

> For more than a month now, the Biden administration and other allies of Israel have been urging its leaders to scale back the war in Gaza. A more targeted battle plan, these allies have said, could reduce civilian casualties while still weakening Hamas. Some Israeli officials have made the same argument. It's now clear that Israel's leaders have followed the advice, at least partially.
>
> The Israeli military announced a strategic shift two weeks ago. It has reduced the number of troops in Northern Gaza. And the most tangible sign of the change is the decline in deaths among Gazan residents, as reported by the Hamas-controlled local government. The number of Gazans dying each day has fallen almost in half since early December and almost two-thirds since the peak in late October. The chart here is based on a *New York Times* compilation of UN reports that rely on information from Gazan officials.

Because Israel went from killing 350 Palestinians a day to roughly 220, this was a sign, according to Leonhardt, that international and US pressure on Israel was working. The obvious implication being that the "war" was winding down, and pressure on Biden to assert a ceasefire using the threat of an arms embargo was pointless and misguided. The war, of course, did not wind down, and the killing levels fluctuated through the next two years. But what the reduction signaled was a longer-term strategy of killing via disease and starvation, in addition to bombs killing 100 to 200 Palestinians a

day, indefinitely. Since Leonhardt published his "Decline of deaths in Gaza" article, studies show over 60,000 Palestinians have been killed, with tens of thousands more maimed or otherwise permanently disfigured.[55]

If a wonkish commentator took to the pages of the *New York Times* on January 22, 2024, with the headline "107 Days without Hamas Killing an Israeli," this would be seen as absurd and morally obtuse. Yet somehow Israel killing over 200 Palestinians a day, 40 percent of them children, is framed as a victory for the forces of peace and restraint. Reading this one could be under the distinct impression that to the *New York Times* wonk set, Palestinian lives aren't *real lives*; they aren't real humans with dreams and families and complex inner worlds. But are, instead, a kind of faceless horde, and the need to sacrifice them on the altar of "Israeli security" is definitionally boundless. To the extent that their deaths present a problem, it's entirely PR in nature.

Leonhardt's output was routinely full of glib, implicitly genocidal clichés about Hamas "hiding among civilians" and nihilistically promoting civilian deaths as a matter of strategy. In one typical December 2023 explanation[56] of "Hamas' strategy," Leonhardt told his liberal readership that

> Hamas has long hidden its fighters and weapons in and under populated civilian areas, such as hospitals and mosques. It does so partly to force Israel to make a gruesome calculation: To fight Hamas, Israel often must also harm civilians. Since Oct. 7, Israel's leaders have decided to accept that trade-off, primarily by attacking Hamas with powerful airstrikes that have killed thousands of civilian Gazans.

Setting aside the fact that the claim that Hamas "hides" "fighters and weapons in and under" "hospitals and mosques" in any systemic way is not an assertion backed by any human rights group, the basic premise that Palestinian militants lust after mass killing of their own people, while Israel only kills them *With a Heavy Heart* when *They*

Have No Choice, is simply taken for granted. It's not explained, there are no links to any evidence or analysis, and no rigor whatsoever. Racist assumptions about heartless barbarians and civilized, reluctant Israelis are just assumed. An ideological, highly contested set of assumptions requires no work, no proof, no first principles. To *New York Times* editors and fact checkers, it just *is*.

Take another deeply incurious explainer from February 20, 2024:[57] "Three Questions About Rafah," published right after Israel announced their intention to invade Rafah. Leonhardt patiently explains to his skeptical liberal audience why Israel has to invade and raze Rafah, expel its residents, and kill thousands in the process, ostensibly to "destroy Hamas." Like his other analyses, Leonhardt never questions Israel's good-faith motives, never proposes any ulterior objectives, and never examines whether Israel's nominal aim of "eliminating Hamas" is either achievable or a genuine aim. "Two things, then, are simultaneously true," a sage-like Leonhardt writes. "To defeat a violent enemy, Israel may need to invade Rafah. And an invasion of Rafah would almost certainly worsen the war's awful civilian toll." Note how Hamas is a "violent enemy," but the party that would go on to reduce Rafah to a wasteland, expel its 275,000 residents, destroy 89 percent of its buildings, and kill thousands in the process isn't "violent"—just reluctant warriors killing thousands with a perpetually Heavy Heart.

In the same article, Leonhardt frames Egypt's refusal to take part in Israel's well-documented ethnic cleansing campaign (since entirely planned out in the open) as evidence of Arab duplicity. "How might Rafah's civilians be protected?" Leonhardt ponders with child-like wonder, accepting the premise that Israel is concerned with protecting civilians. "In many wars, civilians find safety in a neighboring country, but Egypt has largely refused to accept refugees. It is instead building a wall near Rafah." Anyone with a cursory understanding of the history of Palestinian displacement, namely the Nakba, knows that Palestinians being displaced by "war" is always a one-way ticket—indeed, 75 percent of those in Gaza pre-October 7 were either refugees from previous ethnic cleans-

ing campaigns or the descendants of those who are. An essential fact Leonhardt assumes his audience likely doesn't know or really doesn't want to hear. The posture is always vaguely gesturing toward Israel's responsibility, only to deflect, offload, downplay, and reframe as frustrated—if incomplete—magnanimity.

Like almost all his analyses, Leonhardt would go out of his way to remind Times readers that Biden was outraged and frustrated by "too many civilian deaths," but ultimately powerless to do anything about it. "Biden administration officials are frustrated that Netanyahu does not have a clearer plan for protecting civilians in Rafah, according to my colleagues in Washington," he writes. The idea that Leonhardt's "colleagues in Washington" could uncritically be reciting self-serving spin never occurred to Leonhardt, nor does Leonhardt ever seriously entertain the fact that Biden can use military support as leverage to achieve any of his supposed human rights aims.

This type of middlebrow, hand-wavey, casually racist, and incurious output was a hallmark of Leonardt's analyses throughout the genocide, teed up in liberals' inboxes every morning as a sort of genocide SSRI, waiting to be swallowed by a cohort of readers who'd just as well not be bothered by the disturbing images they would invariably come across that day on Twitter/X or TikTok. Leonardt relied almost exclusively on US, Israeli and pro-Israeli sources. In his 26 articles on Gaza in the first year, he only spoke to two Palestinian sources directly, Mahmoud Shalabi, a resident in the city of Beit Lahia, in an article on starvation in Gaza,[58] and Tariq Kenney-Shawa, a fellow at Al-Shabaka, a Palestinian think-tank, in an article on the "strategic dilemma" of maintaining the November 2023 temporary ceasefire.[59] Nevertheless, Leonhardt was never presented by the *New York Times* as an ideologue invested in Israeli-US regional supremacy, or as a defender of the White House, but rather, as a neutral observer using all the trappings of an objective analyst, simply giving it to the readers straight. And he just so happened to always be deflecting, excusing, and downplaying the quickly emerging, inconvenient reality of a US-backed genocide.

THE UTILITY OF "DAY AFTER" WISH-CASTING

The manifest nihilism of Israel's mass killing, the obvious futility of their nominal war aims, and the psychological necessities of cognitive dissonance quickly created a buyer's market for what can best be described as liberal busy work. Diplomats and *Very Serious* pundits alike needed, for want of a better descriptor, *something to do* as they shoveled money and weapons into the daily killing machine—something that seemed to be peace-seeking and provided some moral logic to rationalize the daily death and destruction. In addition to the *Ceasefire Theater* detailed in Chapter 3, a corollary narrative quickly emerged where Western pundits and Biden officials got to openly speculate about the so-called "day after"—how Gaza would look "after the war" with the implication that what was happening in Gaza was both a "war" in any traditional sense (rather than an explicit campaign of de-population and terror) and was something that could be "won." It was a brilliant genre of pseudo-journalism because it involved lots of *Serious People* in *Serious Rooms* "meeting" with "the heads of Arab states" and involved alleged backroom arm-twisting of Israeli officials. The problem with the *Day After Narrative*, aside from the fact that it handwaved away the actual genocidal policies and dodged the issue of compelling Israel to enter a real, lasting ceasefire, was that it was premised on a glaring contradiction that no one in our media ever thought to reconcile. How can the White House "seek a ceasefire" and plan for the "day after *with Hamas no longer in power*" without militarily defeating Hamas, something Blinken himself reportedly said was impossible as early as January 2024? How did this make sense?

It wasn't supposed to. The PR value of the Day After Narrative wasn't to honestly game out what a post-Hamas Gaza would look like, it was to smuggle in the highly contested premise that such an eventuality was both sought by Israel and was always just around the corner if we simply *Stuck to the War Plan*. "Day after" discourse, like *Ceasefire Theater*, quickly became a variation of the *Two-State Solution*, a liberal bedtime story with little relation to either the facts on the ground or the decision-making going on within Israel. It was

a vague aspirational fantasy the White House fed to the media to look busy while supporting, in reality, the horrific policies of mass killing. Throughout late 2023 and deep into 2024, Biden White House officials constantly floated "day after" wish-casting in US media with virtually no pushback. One typical example was White House stenographer Barak Ravid at *Axios*, who—just like he did with his suite of *Angry Biden* articles—had an impressive number of "scoops" on the subject:

- "Scoop: Bibi's Top Confidant to Visit White House for Talks on Gaza War" (January 30, 2024) "Israeli Minister for Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer is expected to visit Washington on Wednesday and meet White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan … for talks on the war in Gaza and Israel's plans for the **day after** the fighting ends"[60]
- "Scoop: State Department Reviewing Options for Possible Recognition of Palestinian State" (January 31, 2024)—"Blinken is expected to meet with Israeli Minister for Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer later Wednesday and discuss the situation in Gaza, plans for the **day after** the war"[61]
- "Scoop: Arab Officials Held Secret Meeting to Discuss Plans for Post-War Gaza" (January 28, 2024)—"Senior national security officials from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority secretly met in Riyadh 10 days ago to coordinate plans for the **day after** the war in Gaza"[62]
- "Scoop: U.S., Israel, Palestinian Authority hold Secret Talks on Rafah Crossing" (July 17, 2023)—"This was the first time since Oct. 7 that U.S., Israeli and Palestinian officials met together to discuss the **day after** the war ends in Gaza"[63]
- "Scoop: U.S., Israel and UAE Held a Secret Meeting On Gaza War '**Day After**' **Plan"** (July 23, 2024)[64]
- "Scoop: Blinken Weighs Presenting Gaza Post-War Plan after November Election" (October 16, 2024) "presenting a "**day-after**" **plan** could be a potentially positive part of the Biden administration's legacy surrounding the conflict"[65]

- "Scoop: Blinken to Present Post-War Plan for Gaza on Tuesday" (January 14, 2025) "Blinken is down to his last week in Foggy Bottom, but he hopes his blueprint will become a reference point for any **future day-after plan for Gaza**, including for the incoming Trump administration."[66]

But this PR effort wasn't limited to *Axios*. From October 2023 to July 2024, there were a total of 76 uncritical "day after" articles identified in our media survey: twelve in *Axios*, 18 in the *New York Times*, 22 in the *Washington Post*, six in *Politico*, four in Associated Press News, twelve in CNN.com and one in *USA Today*. All but one accepted, without skepticism, the basic premise that Israel was involved in a good-faith regime change war and that it, at some point very soon, would drive out Hamas and "rebuild" a new Gaza in its wake. Two major exceptions were a modestly skeptical June 2024 analysis by Nahal Toosi in *Politico*, "Why So Many 'Day After' Plans for Gaza Amount to No Plan at All,"[67] and an early debunking in the *Atlantic*, in the aforementioned "Israel's Dangerous Delusion" by Hussein Ibish.

These nebulous "day after" plans always involved "Arab partners," chief among them Saudi Arabia, which US media implicitly and explicitly stated could effectively occupy Gaza in lieu of Israel or the US. This premise relied on the Interchangeable Arab Trope popular among Zionists that rarely, if ever, acknowledged that Palestinians are a distinct people and culture, and a Saudi occupation would, thus, still be viewed by most Palestinians as a proxy for US–Israeli occupation. A People's Company for Polls and Survey Research (PCPSR) poll taken in Gaza during the November 2023 temporary truce showed Saudi Arabia's approval rating among Palestinians was 5 percent—comparable to the UK's 4 percent—yet Mohammed bin Salman, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, was routinely painted by US media as some type of pope of the Arabs who could seamlessly take over and administer Gaza.

Day After stories almost always glossed over the issue of Hamas' role in "post-war" Gaza, only rarely addressing what this would

actually entail in detail and substance. The formula broadly went like this:

1. Achieve a lasting ceasefire, end the war.
2. ???
3. Palestinian militants disappear and surrender via magic.
4. Mercenary "Arab" occupation takes over, rebuilding begins.

The point was to provide journalists with something, anything, that wasn't the boring, miserable reality: that the US was rubber-stamping everything Israel was doing and providing it with endless weapons. Like the *Helpless Biden* nonstory, "day after" coverage gave the appearance of movement, of peace-seeking, of humanitarian intervention—of *Serious Diplomacy*—all while smuggling in every premise that justified the ongoing killing and starving of Palestinians. The fact that these plans, like the one-note *Angry Biden* stories, never actually went anywhere or left the white-boarding stages did nothing to erode the media's default credulity. The White House said they were working on "post-war plans" and that was that. No reason to question ulterior motives, no reason to refocus on the actual issue at hand: the US' ongoing material support for the destruction of Gaza. The "war" was just about to be won, and we know that because, why else would they be planning for a perpetually imminent—but always elusive—"post-war" period?

Conclusion

Writing what is, in effect, an analysis designed for posterity about a genocide while said genocide is still ongoing is a very strange thing to do. As this book was being written, as the research for the first year of the genocide in Gaza was being assembled and analyzed, the genocide was still happening and, depending on when you are reading this, may well still be. Working toward accountability for aiding genocide, while the process is still unfolding and one is met almost every morning with a new horror—mass shooting on hungry crowds, summary execution, bombing, image of a starving child—is an unsettling and, oftentimes throughout the process, a seemingly inadequate intervention. But, I felt, ultimately, a useful one, which is to say the only meaningful one I could offer. Like the Little Drummer Boy, who can only play the drum for his newborn king, the only meaningful thing a media critic can do to oppose genocide is media criticism, as removed and academic as it may often seem. But I felt it was an important contribution and urged others to expand on this, and previous media criticism from others, to detect, flag, and respond to the regime of dehumanization that is very much still ongoing. Operations of mass killing on this scale don't happen without PR cover; they don't happen without a propagandized, misled, distracted and lied-to public. And because our survey period took place while a Democratic White House was arming, funding, and providing diplomatic cover for the genocide in Gaza, news outlets popular with Democrats were essential to this dual process of dehumanization and feigned humanitarianism, of elimination and alleged ceasefire negotiations, of weapons shipments and crocodile tears. Their complicity in the genocide was rarely as openly racist as Fox News or the Free Press, but they were simultaneously more impactful and more subtle and thus more

decisive in priming the public for a campaign of mass killing and population removal.

This book was written to expand on the excellent media criticism in the *Breach*, *Electronic Intifada*, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, *Aljazeera*, Writers Against the War on Gaza, the *Nation*, *Zeteo*, the *Real News*, *Drop Site News*, *Truthout*, *Mondoweiss*, *In These Times*, *Prism*, and many others I will no doubt leave out.

A final note on a popular refrain that history will look poorly on those who supported the genocide in Gaza. I don't mean to disparage those who traffic in this sentiment or similar ideas; it's understandable, the Whiggish belief that, like the Vietnam and Iraq Wars, it will be a liberal consensus in some near future that Biden and the elite media were wrong to push out the lies justifying the destruction of Gaza beginning in October 2023. I understand the impulse that, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." But on the issue of Gaza, and specifically *when the fact of the Gaza genocide occurred,* I don't believe this to be the case in the United States, and, in fact, I believe the opposite will happen. Setting aside the fact that the institutions and people who supported the destruction of Vietnam and Iraq faced no real professional consequences and, more often than not, had their careers advanced, I'm not convinced the genocide in Gaza will even be indexed as a liberal "mistake" as these previous atrocities often were in polite company. The alternative history being offered is long underway: the initial "war" was a justified but ultimately hotheaded "overreaction" to October 7. That Hamas knew the score and condemned its own people to mass death. That Biden did his best to "rein in" Israel but was overwhelmed by the manipulative wile of Netanyahu or a lack of "political cover" at home. That, in a similar line of rationalization, the people of Israel were forced into supporting genocide by a one-off quasi-dictator. These, or some combination thereof, have already taken root and will no doubt occupy a great deal of liberal moral bandwidth in the coming years as those who justified, supported, and defended the destruction of the Palestinian people in Gaza in late 2023 and through 2025 seek higher office and the approval of progressive nonprofits, or as

they attempt to get back into the good graces of the young voters they understandably drove away in the last presidential election. But mostly I think the genocide in Gaza will be put into a memory hole, forgotten, dismissed as a lefty "obsession," or hung up, the disproportionate focus of which, it will be heavily implied, is evidence of latent antisemitism. And that will be that.

This is not to undermine the hope inherent within Palestinian resistance, but specifically in the context of the US—and the Democratic Party in particular—there will likely be no accountability, no recriminations in the 2027–2028 primary. Genocides only have accountability when the party committing the genocide is defeated. Remorse follows from shame, and shame, on an institutional level, follows from social costs. When the ones carrying out the genocide not only survive but rise to the top, especially when the crime is bipartisan in nature, the genocide will fade into the background. Those who backed the destruction of Gaza are too big to fail, and their leftwing flank is too sophisticated when it comes to absorbing popular discontent via nonprofits, academic co-option, online celebrity and the constant specter—real and imagined—of the Trolley Problem elections needed to defeat an increasingly fascistic domestic right-wing every 24 months. There will be no *mea culpas* in 2033, no political careers derailed, no pundits saying how they *Got It Wrong* because that's not how these things work anymore. Gaza was very much about Israel's uniquely chauvinist project of removing an inconvenient people, but, especially when it came to uniform European and US support, was very much about something else. That something else is often euphemistically called American or Western "credibility," but it's about drawing a line in the sand, of saying *no amount of public outrage will stop us from carrying out an agenda of subjugation we deem necessary. We will police, distort, incite, obscure, outlaw, co-opt with nonprofits, and disappear dissent until popular opposition is duly neutralized.*

As global inequality continues to balloon and climate change threatens the US and European-led global order by, in part, driving refugees throughout the Global South north to safer harbor, we will likely see versions of Gaza play out in the coming decades across var-

ious peripheries (setting aside Gaza itself which is likely to remain in a perpetual state of genocide in the coming years, with varying degrees of severity and media indifference). The context will obviously be different, and it will rarely be as deadly and ideologically driven, but the message, again cloaked in "American credibility," will remain. And the model of deflection, dehumanization, and liberal excuse-making perfected during the Gaza genocide will be the template—the weapons, technological and rhetorical, having been sharpened over late 2023 into 2025. Carrying out a livestreamed genocide of an already dispossessed population, in HD video for over two years, without any meaningful domestic pushback, was a historic achievement by the US security state and its media allies. Rather than this successful PR campaign inviting introspection and accountability, it's far more likely that—unless something radically changes in our politics—it will, in an increasingly unstable and warming world, invite widespread historical revisionism, approving military study and, ultimately, duplication.

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